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# GREAT FIGURES AND EVENTS IN JEWISH HISTORY

*By*

RABBI HIRSCH BRAVER

VOLUME I

*From the Gaonic Period Through the Golden Age*

NEW YORK

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DEDICATED  
*to the*  
JEWISH YOUTH  
*and the*  
JEWISH HOME  
*in*  
AMERICA

*Jewish history admonishes the Jews: Noblesse oblige. The privilege of belonging to a people to whom the honorable title of the "Veteran of History" has been conceded puts serious responsibilities on your shoulders. You must demonstrate that you are worthy of your heroic past.*

—S. M. Dubnow.



## PREFACE

“Ye shall be unto Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.”—*Exodus xix.6*

“Man is made man by history. The Jew recognizes that he is made what he is by the history of his fathers, and feels that he is losing his better self so far as he loses his hold on his past history.”—*Joseph Jacobs*.

“Remember the days of old, consider the years of many generations.” This was the counsel which the faithful leader addressed to his people in the last days of his life. If Moses, “greatest of all prophets,” deemed it wise to remind Israel of his past, when the nation was as yet in its youth and witnessed the revelation on Sinai and the sheltering hand of the All-merciful God, Who wrought for His people wonders in the “land of bondage” and in the wilderness, how much more necessary and important is such an admonition to us at this time, when great numbers of Israel’s sons and daughters have turned their backs to the sacred heritage of the past, and the glorious history of their fathers has become, as a rule, an unknown land to them. Jewish children and, indeed, Jewish adults read much of the heroes and great men of other nations, but they know far too little of their own heroes, whose lofty teaching, devotion and enthusiasm helped to preserve Judaism.

It is vital for us to awaken within the hearts of our

young men and women the consciousness that they are members of a great, eternal and indomitable nation which has upheld the banner of the soul in the teeth of a hostile world. This book will, I trust, do something to stimulate interest among modern Jews in the glorious and fascinating story of the Chosen People from whom they have sprung. The splendor of their ancient heritage will then sink into their consciousness, becoming part of themselves, and they will be thrilled by the tremendous responsibility devolving upon them as members of God's Chosen People—"a kingdom of priests and a holy nation."

The most important and unique feature of my work, which, I believe, no author of post-Biblical history has ever introduced in his writings, is the presentation of the material in the form of questions and answers. The material covered in this volume is not taken at random, but is arranged systematically and chronologically. The historic events and the various personalities whose influence was brought to bear upon the development of Jewish history and thought, appear in the book in the order in which they occurred in Jewish history. Every answer is clear, terse and concise. It answers the question fully and yet as briefly as possible.

The staff of teachers who instruct in Jewish history in the religious schools conducted on Sundays consists largely of Jewish girls and boys, who themselves have a very meager knowledge of Jewish history, and, naturally, are perplexed as to how to present the subject matter to their students. Then, again, the students to whom a chapter of Jewish history is assigned, and whose time is devoted almost entirely to secular studies, are under most trying difficulties as to how to form

a clear idea of what they read, and consequently how to retain it in their memory. The presentation of Jewish history in the form of questions and answers will, I trust, solve these perplexing problems. In fact, it has been tried and found to be successful.

I have endeavored to write in a style sufficiently simple for young people, and yet in such a form as to attract older readers. My book is for this reason a text book both for school *and* home; for, in the words of the historian Dubnow, "History is a science *by* the people, *for* the people, and, therefore, its place is the open forum, not the scholar's musty closet. We relate the events of the past to the *people*, not merely to a handful of archæologists and numismatians. We work for national self-knowledge, not for our own intellectual diversion. The history of a people is not a mere mental discipline, like botany or mathematics, but a living science, a *magistra vitæ*, leading straight to national self-knowledge, and acting to a certain degree upon the national character."

In view of his own limitations, the author has had to rely on the works of others, and, indeed, the book represents the synthesis of existing works. He consulted various text books, Graetz' *History of the Jews* and the *Jewish Encyclopedia*, both in English and Hebrew. Like Maimonides, "I have not invented this explanation, nor myself framed these assertions, but I have taken them from the words of the wise and gathered them from the works of others. Though I do not name them, I do not claim by my silence the learning of others as my own, for I have just admitted that much is taken from other sources." The original note of this work rests entirely upon the systematic presentation

of Jewish history in the form of questions and answers, the service of which, I trust, will be appreciated by students of Jewish history at school and at home.

Dealing with the life of Maimonides, I introduced a special chapter on Maimonides' *Thirteen Principles of Judaism*, explaining these tenets in a style sufficiently simple for the comprehension of young people. This chapter, which no historical book, as far as I know, has ever treated fully or even partly, is, I hope, of special importance and interest. Taking into consideration the fact that the children attend a *religious* school, the "Thirteen Principles of Faith," in my opinion, far from being foreign to, are essentially an integral part of, Jewish history. Furthermore, they deserve to be explained to the student as much as the other works of Maimonides. I have also included a chapter on false Messiahs who appeared in Jewish history from the first century down to the end of the thirteenth century.

The author expresses his grateful indebtedness and warm acknowledgments to Mr. Maurice H. Cohen for a most careful reading of the whole MS. and for many corrections and suggestions.



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GREAT FIGURES AND EVENTS  
IN JEWISH HISTORY

I

From the Gaonic Period through  
the Golden Age



## I

### THE COLLEGES OF SURA AND PUMPEDITHA

*1. Who were the founders of the Babylonian Colleges?*

After the conquest of Judea by the Romans, Babylonia became the principal center of Jewish learning. The college of Sura was founded in the year 219 by Rab (Abba Arika), the pupil of Rabbi Judah the Prince, who compiled the Mishnah. At the same time, Rab's friend, Samuel, founded the college of Nehardea, on the banks of the river Euphrates, and, when this was destroyed in the year 259, the neighboring college of Pumpeditha was founded by Judah ben Ezekiel, the pupil of Rab and Samuel.

*2. Which of these was the leading College?*

The college of Sura was the leading academy of the Babylonian Jews. Sura acquired the leading authority under Huna, Rab's pupil, but gained its chief prominence under Ashi, the principal compiler of the Babylonian Talmud, who died in 427. The Babylonian Talmud may, indeed, be considered the work of the Sura College, as Ashi submitted it, treatise by treatise, to the scholars of Sura over whom he presided for more than fifty years.

3. *What is the name given to the period after the close of the Talmud?*

After the period of the Amoraim, who compiled the Babylonian Talmud, and of the Saboraim, who edited it, a new agè was ushered in—the period of the Gaonim, which covered 450 years, beginning with the year 589, when Rab Chanan of Iskiya became the Gaon of Pumpeditha College, down to the year 1040, when the last Gaon of Pumpeditha, Hezekiah (Hai Gaon's successor), died.

4. *What does Gaonim mean and who were they?*

The name gaon (singular of gaonim) means “excellency” or “the great one,” and is thought to be an abbreviation of “Gaon Jacob” (The Excellency of Jacob) from the words in Psalms xlvii.4. The gaon was the dean or principal of the college. It is merely a complimentary name. His official title was “Resh Methibta” or “Resh Yeshibah” (*i. e.* head of the college) “Methibta” being the Aramaic, and “Yeshibah” the Hebrew, word for college. In the early days of the Amoraim they were called “Resh Sidra,” the latter being another name for college.

5. *What were the duties of the Gaonim?*

The gaonim were not only (1) the directors of their colleges but (2) the chief judges of all the Jewish communities. They regulated the social and religious affairs of the Jewish people, supervised their education and popularized Jewish learning. (3) They arranged the order of service in the synagogue, and, by their decisions on Jewish law, brought the newer Jewish life in the countries of exile into harmony

with the rules laid down by former rabbis. Thus, the gaonim were the religious, educational and social leaders of the Jewish people, which means that they had to deal with their everyday lives from all points of view.

6. *What was the "Kallah"?*

The kallah, which is derived from an Aramaic word meaning assembly, was a conference of teachers and students from all parts of the country, who assembled at the college of Sura twice a year, before the festivals of Passover and New Year, in the Jewish months of Adar and Ellul (corresponding to March and September).

7. *What was the purpose of the Kallah?*

Owing to the scattered character of the Jewish population of Babylonia, the teachers of the various communities found it necessary to consult the rabbis at the principal centers of learning. Questions on Jewish law were also sent to the colleges from various congregations, not only in Babylonia, but also in other parts of the world. As it became necessary to give decisions on these points, and also to settle other questions which had been discussed at the college, the kallah came into being, which discussed and decided upon all questions.

8. *What was the organization of the Kallah?*

The kallah comprised two Houses of Parliament and a Cabinet. One hundred and ten scholars sat in eleven rows of ten each. The front row was occupied by distinguished learned men. Seven of these were

each called "Resh Kallah" (head of the kallah). These were the professors of the college. The three others in the front row were called "Chaberim" (associates), who were the associate professors. These ten scholars formed the president's cabinet. Each of the seven "Resh Kallah" had under him ten "Allufim" (masters), who were ordained as rabbis. These seventy scholars formed the "Great Sanhedrin" (or parliament), and were entitled to vote on matters brought before the kallah. Each of the three chaberim had also under him ten members of the college, and these thirty scholars formed the "Small Sanhedrin." The president of the kallah was either the gaon himself or the "Ab Beth Din" (president of the court of justice), who ranked next to the gaon. At the kallah were present many other students of the college, who were not ordained as rabbis and had no vote in the proceedings.

*9. What was the order of proceedings of the Kallah?*

During the first three weeks of the kallah, the allufim discussed a treatise of the Talmud which had been assigned for study, and, during the fourth week, the president examined those present, individually. Then again, each day the president laid before the kallah some of the questions that had been sent in from all parts. All kinds of information were sought by the Jewish communities in various countries—questions with regard to some Jewish law or custom, difficult passages in the Bible or the Talmud, the origin of a prayer in the synagogue service and so on. Some of the questions were answered by the gaon himself on his own authority. Others were considered by the



"Beth Din" (court of justice), whose president prepared the replies. Others, again, were submitted to the kallah for consideration. The proposed answers, after they had been decided, were recorded by the secretary of the college. The gaon approved and signed them, and affixed to them the seal of the college.

*10. Tell of the activities of the colleges.*

The colleges had a large number of permanent students, called "Bene be-Rab" (sons of the college). When a member of the college died, his son, if considered worthy, was entitled to his father's place. The allufim received a salary, and the students were supported by the funds of the college, to which the various Jewish communities contributed. Then, again, there were two Jewish courts attached to each college. One was called the "Beth Din Gadol" (supreme court of justice), which was presided over by the gaon. This court appointed judges, and acted also as a court of appeal. The other court dealt with minor cases, and was presided over by the "Ab Beth Din" (president of the court of justice).

*11. What was the Gaonim's contribution to Jewish literature and life?*

The gaonim left us some of their "Answers" (or "Teshuboth," as they are called in Hebrew, and "Responsa" in Latin). Everything they wrote was terse and clear, and they went to endless trouble to answer every question fully. They did not reply to questions with a mere "yes" or "no," but gave authentic sources for every ruling. These "answers" are most important literary and historical documents, for

they contain valuable explanations of the origin of Jewish laws and customs, and much information about the life of the Jewish people at that time. Thus, the gaonim kept alive the authority of the traditional Jewish Law.

*12. What position do the Gaonim occupy in Judaism?*

The gaonim occupy a significant position among the Jewish people, being recognized as the chief authorities on Jewish law in all parts of the world, just as the Tanaïm, who compiled the Mishnah, and the Amoraim, who compiled the Talmud, had been before them. At first their influence was chiefly among the Jews in Moslem countries, such as Persia, Spain and North Africa, in addition of course, to Babylonia itself. Afterwards, however, their authority also extended to the Jews in Christian countries.

## THE PRINCE OF THE EXILE

*13. Who was the Prince of the Exile?*

While the gaonim presided over the colleges, and were the religious, educational and social leaders of the Jews, the "Resh Galutha" (Exilarch, or Prince of the Exile) ruled over the whole of the Jews of Babylonia, and was their political representative at the Court of the Persian King and, afterwards, under the Moslem rule, at the Palace of the Caliph. The exilarch was a descendant of the royal house of David, and his office came into existence after the dispersion of the Jews from the Holy Land, and was handed down from father to son,

14. *Describe the importance of the Exilarch.*

The authority of the exilarch extended over all the countries now known as Arabia, Mesopotamia and Persia, to the borders of India and Tibet. By assisting the Moslems against the Persian King in the seventh century, the exilarch earned the protection of the caliphs. As a mark of favor, the Exilarch Bostanai (the first exilarch under Moslem rule) was given as his wife the daughter of the Persian King who had been taken prisoner. He obtained from the Caliph permission to wear a signet ring, bearing the image of a fly, with which to seal official documents. The prince of the exile was regarded by Jews and non-Jews as a person of great dignity and distinction. Once a year in the third week after the Feast of Tabernacles, the two gaonim of Sura and Pumpeditha journeyed to Bagdad (the residence of the exilarch) to pay homage to the Jewish prince, and a great assembly of scholars then took place. All the Jewish communities contributed toward the official expenses of the exilarch, who was, however, a wealthy man on his own account, having possessed large estates in addition to his magnificent palace.

15. *Describe the installation of the Exilarch.*

The formal installation of the prince of the exile took place on Thursday, amidst the sound of trumpets and the cheers of the people. The important part of the ceremony consisted in the two gaonim placing their hands on the head of the new exilarch, and saying: "Long live our Lord, the Prince of the Exile." A more impressive ceremony took place on the Sabbath. The heads of the community called for the

new exilarch at his palace, and accompanied him to the magnificent Great Synagogue of Bagdad. There were ten marble steps leading up to the Ark, and on the top step was the raised seat of the exilarch, with a rich canopy above it, covered in costly silk cloth of many colors and valuable ornaments. As the exilarch entered the Synagogue, accompanied by the gaonim, the whole congregation rose and remained standing until he took his seat. The two gaonim bowed to the exilarch, and the gaon of Sura took his seat on his right and the gaon of Pumpeditha on his left. The portion of the Torah was read by the exilarch and explained by the gaon of Sura (sometimes by the exilarch himself). When the chazan recited the "Kad-dish" (Prayer of Sanctification) and reached the words: "May He establish His Kingdom during your life and during your days," he added "and during the life of our prince, the exilarch."

*16. What were the duties of the Exilarch?*

(1) The prince of the exile, as the political representative of the Jews, called on the caliph, whenever it was necessary, and made certain requests of him on behalf of the Jewish communities. (2) He was the chief tax-collector for the Jewish population. (3) The exilarch, too, shared with the gaonim the appointment of the principal judges, and occasionally appointed the gaonim. As a rule, however, the gaonim were elected by the colleges, and were entirely independent of the prince of the exile; the exilarch was a person of much importance and power for nearly a thousand years.

*17. Who of the two Gaonim was superior?*

The gaon of Sura, even in case he was younger, was superior to the gaon of Pumpeditha. (1) When the exilarch was absent, the gaon of Sura represented him, and, on his death, acted as his regent until a successor was appointed. (2) Letters to the college of Sura were addressed to "the gaon and scholars of Sura," while those to Pumpeditha were addressed to "the scholars of Pumpeditha," not to the gaon. (3) At the ceremony of the exilarch's installation in the synagogue, the gaon of Sura took his seat on the prince's right and the gaon of Pumpeditha on his left.

*18. Why was the Gaon of Sura more important?*

Owing to the ancient reputation of Sura College, which was the leading academy of the Babylonian Jews, the gaon of Sura, though he was younger, was superior, and on every occasion took the leading role. In this way the dignity of the senior college was maintained.

NOTE. Because of the superior reputation of the rabbis of the colleges of Sura and Pumpeditha, the Babylonian version of the Talmud became more widely read than the Jerusalem version, and the authority of the Babylonian rabbis was recognized by Jews in other parts of the world, even in the Holy Land.

## II

### THE MOHAMMEDAN RELIGION

#### *1. When did Jews settle in Arabia?*

Jews settled in Arabia from very early times, and, after the conquest of Judea by the Romans, large numbers found their way there. In the north of Arabia the Jewish tribes lived mostly the life of wandering herdsmen, and in the district of Chaibar a Jewish tribe, supposed to have been descended from the Rechabites, formed a Jewish state. In the south of Arabia, however, they were numerous, and here they engaged in commerce with India, Persia and other countries.

#### *2. What was the religion of the Arabs?*

The Arabs of the north, who were Bedouins (wandering tribesmen), worshipped idols, while those of the south, who were merchants and better educated than the Bedouins, recognized one supreme God whom they called "Allah"; but they also worshipped idols, the stars and ogres. Mecca was their holy city, in the center of which was a black stone, called Kaaba, which they worshipped as an idol. In fact, three hundred idols were associated with this place.

*3. What was the attitude of the Arabs towards the Jews?*

The Arabs were very friendly towards the Jews, and sometimes appointed Jews to lead them. They traced their descent from Ishmael, Abraham's son, and thus Arabs and Jews had a common ancestor. The Hebrew and Arabic languages were similar, and this made it easy for the two peoples to mix. They became acquainted with the Bible, adopted many Jewish customs, and many of them became Jews. The most important convert to Judaism was Yussuf, the powerful King of Yemen, about the year 500 C. E.

MOHAMMED  
570-632

*4. Tell of the early life of Mohammed.*

Mohammed (which means "much praised") was born in the year 570 at the town of Mecca, and belonged to the powerful Arab tribe, Koreish. He began life as a shepherd. At twenty-five he married Kedija, who employed him as camel-driver. As camel-driver his early years were spent amongst the Bedouins of the desert, and there is no doubt that he must have become acquainted with the teachings of Judaism which were so prevalent among the Arabian people. Mohammed's home town, Mecca, which was the principal center for the various Arabian tribes, was visited by merchants from other parts of the world. The Koreish of Mecca thus learned about the affairs and thoughts of other people. In this way Mohammed learned from Jewish teachers the idea of One God, whom he called "Allah" (meaning, in Arabic, God).

5. *What was Mohammed's new religion?*

In the year 610, when Mohammed was thirty-nine years old, he began to preach a new religion. The essence of his new faith was: (1) Unity of God—there was only one powerful God, who might not be represented by any image, and who created heaven and earth. (2) Prayer—appointed times of communion with God. (3) Charity—alms giving. He preached against the idolatry which was practised by the Arabs, and the immorality, greed and injustice which he found among them. The new religion was called Islam and its followers Moslems, both meaning in Arabic "submission," *i. e.* to God.

6. *What was the attitude of the people of Mecca toward Mohammed?*

Mohammed gradually gathered around him a small band of followers but had many opponents. At first he was regarded by the leading people of Mecca as a dreamer and magician, and they mocked him. Afterwards, however, as Mohammed's followers grew in numbers, they persecuted him. Mohammed strongly denounced the idols of the Kaaba and many of the cherished traditions and superstitions of the Arabs. Partly for this reason and partly because the success of his preaching meant the loss of rich profits derived from the pilgrims who came to the "holy city" of Mecca, the people opposed him bitterly. His life was full of peril.

7. *What was "The Hegira"?*

Mohammed realized that Mecca was not a suitable place for his mission. As he suffered much priva-



tion, he looked about for another field for his activity. He happened to meet some relatives from Yathrib, where there were a large number of Jews, and where, in consequence, the Arabs were well acquainted with Jewish ideas. These men took up his cause and invited him to settle in Yathrib. Owing to the opposition of the people of Mecca toward him, his life was in constant danger. Mohammed accordingly escaped from Mecca and went to Yathrib in the year 622, accompanied by his faithful follower Abu-Bekr. This hasty escape was called *hegira* (flight). Yathrib was changed to *Medinat an Nabi* (*i. e.* the City of the Prophet) and was then shortened to Medina.

8. *What importance is attached to the Hegira?*

The *hegira* marked the turning point in the movement, and from the year 622 Mohammed may be regarded as the leader of the new religion and the founder of a new kingdom. All the Arabs of Medina joined the new religion; Medina became a commonwealth and Mohammed its chief and judge. All disputes, which hitherto were decided by combat, were now brought to him for decision. Thus he began to build up a system of law and justice. The year 622 is the first year of the Moslem calendar.

9. *What was Mohammed's attitude toward the Jews?*

At first Mohammed was on friendly terms with the Jewish tribes in and around Medina, and hoped to number them among his followers. He borrowed from them many Jewish customs, such as regular times for prayer, the Sabbath, a fast day on the Day

of Atonement, laws regarding marriage, burial and cleanliness, and facing the direction of Jerusalem during prayer. In this way Mohammed thought he could influence the Jews to follow him. His expectations, however, were not fulfilled.

*10. What was the Jews' attitude toward Mohammed?*

The Jews saw in Mohammed's teaching the main principles of their own faith, and they had hopes that he would convert the whole of the Arabs to Judaism. A Jew named Waraka Ibn-Naufel is said to have been Mohammed's chief teacher and one of his strongest supporters. When, however, as his position grew stronger, Mohammed added to his declaration: "There is no God but Allah" the phrase "and Mohammed is his prophet"; when he failed to observe many Jewish practices and appropriated Abraham and other Biblical characters for his own purposes, making Abraham an Arab and the founder of the Kaaba; and when, too, he announced that Islam replaced the teaching of the Bible, the Jews openly declined to join the new religion.

*11. Why could not the Jews recognize Mohammed as prophet?*

If the Jews had accepted Mohammed as prophet, they would have been traitors to their traditions and to the teachings of the Bible. The true prophet cannot change Judaism, and must himself be a follower of the Biblical laws and commands (Deuteronomy xviii.15-22). Mohammed, however, claimed that Islam replaced Judaism and failed to comply with

the accepted Jewish practices. Then again, in order to attract the pleasure-loving Arabs, Mohammed had prophesied for even the poorest "believer" a glorious Paradise in the world to come, in which they would live in the midst of beautiful groves and refreshing fountains. They would be clothed in robes of silk and wear pearls and diamonds. Their houses would be marble palaces, they would eat out of dishes of gold, and rich wines and all kinds of luxury would be at their disposal. In this wonderful world a moment of pleasure would be prolonged for a thousand years. Such ideas as these, which were so contrary to Jewish teaching, served still further to strengthen the Jewish opposition to Mohammed.

*12. What was Mohammed's reaction towards the Jewish opposition?*

Mohammed never forgave the Jews for their refusal to accept him as "The Prophet" of God. He accepted so much from them—the belief in One God, the Sabbath, the Day of Atonement and many Jewish practices. He asked of them so little, it seemed to him—to regard him as God's chosen messenger to man—and yet that "little" they did not give him. Having realized, therefore, that he could not count on the Jews, Mohammed accordingly proceeded to alter many of his regulations. Worshippers were instructed to face Mecca instead of Jerusalem during prayer; the period of fasting was changed to the Arabian month of Ramadan; the Sabbath was altered from Saturday to Friday and many of the Jewish observances, which he had at first adopted, were abolished.

*13. What intolerant method did Mohammed adopt against his opponents?*

At first Mohammed advised his followers to treat his opponents mildly. Afterwards, however, in view of the opposition which he had met, not only from the Jews, but also from the Arabs in Mecca, Mohammed called upon the "faithful" to take up the sword against "unbelievers." The various Arab tribes were not accustomed to act together; and, by attacking them singly, Mohammed was able to conquer them all. Meeting with success, Mohammed claimed that God was on his side, and resolved to continue the campaign. Islam now became a religion of conquest, and Mohammed openly attacked various Jewish tribes, whose property was confiscated and some of the tribes were banished.

*14. What was the "War of the Ditch"?*

The Jews, therefore, persuaded some of the Arab tribes to join them in attacking Medina, which Mohammed fortified by surrounding it with a deep ditch and in other ways. In this "war of the ditch," in the year 627, Mohammed was again victorious, and he now proceeded against the remaining Jewish tribe in the neighborhood of Medina, claiming that he had received a communication from the angel Gabriel to march against it. This Jewish tribe was also obliged to surrender after a fruitless defence. Seven hundred Jews were gathered in the market-place and ordered to accept Islam. They refused. They met a martyr's death. The men were slain, the women and children were sold as slaves and all their property was confiscated.

*15. What were the next victories of Mohammed?*

The Jewish state of Chaibar was the next to be conquered, in the year 628, but no such massacre was repeated. Many of the conquered Jews were even left in possession of their lands. By this time all the Jewish tribes lost their independence. In 630 Mohammed entered Mecca as a conqueror, and this decided the supremacy of Islam over the whole of Arabia and beyond. Mohammed's sword ruled supreme everywhere against those who failed to submit to him.

*16. What were the causes for Mohammed's success?*

(1) The weakness of, and divisions within, the Christian Church, which was unable either to resist the onward march of the new religion, or to present its own doctrines in a form acceptable to the peoples who embraced Islam. (2) The feebleness of the Roman and Persian Empires. (3) The power of the sword, hope of plunder and love of conquest. (4) The fact that the Arab tribes were scattered and unaccustomed to unite. (5) The partial truth of Mohammed's teaching, founded as it was on Judaism, and the familiarity of the Arabs with Jewish ideas. (6) The attractiveness to the heathen mind of such an idea as a Paradise where earthly pleasure would be enjoyed. (7) The ability of Mohammed himself. (8) The genius of Mohammed's successors.

*17. What is the Koran?*

The Koran is the "Bible" of the Moslems. The word Koran in Arabic means "the reading" and is derived from the same root as the Hebrew "Kara" meaning "to read." The Koran contains Mohammed's

teachings and stories of his life. It is a book of 114 chapters, some very long, others containing two or three sentences. The Koran was not written by Mohammed, as he could neither write nor read, but it comprises a collection of laws, legends and sayings collected after Mohammed's death from all kinds of sources. The cry "The Koran or the sword" carried "the faithful" to victory everywhere.

*18. Describe the personality of Mohammed.*

Mohammed was immoral, cruel, vain and unscrupulous. There is, however, no doubt as to his great capacity for leadership. Aided by power of the sword, he founded a number of mighty kingdoms as well as a religion, which is still followed by more than two hundred million people. It is not a small thing that millions of heathens should have been converted from the worship of idols to a belief in One God, and that some of the teachings of the Bible should have been spread throughout the world. For this, Jews may be grateful to Mohammed and proud of the influence which Judaism had on the religion which he founded.

*19. When did Mohammed die?*

Mohammed died in the year 632. A Jewish woman named Zainab, who was brought by Mohammed from the war at Chaibar, and who won his favor, tried to avenge the murder of the Jews and her relatives. She pretended to be friendly towards him, and prepared a poisoned dish for him and his companions. One of them died immediately; Mohammed, however, who hardly tasted it, was saved alive, but suffered for a long time, and felt the effects of the poison till

the hour of his death. Questioned by Mohammed as to the reason of her action, Zainab replied: "You have persecuted my people with untold suffering. I, therefore, thought that if you were merely a warrior, I could bring them rest by poisoning you, but if you were really a prophet, God would warn you in time." She was instantly put to death.

### MOHAMMED'S SUCCESSORS

#### *20. Who were Mohammed's successors?*

(1) Abu-Bekr: Mohammed was succeeded in the year 632 by Abu-Bekr, one of his earliest converts and his sole companion when he went to Medina. Abu-Bekr was the first of the Caliphs (*i. e.* "successors"), and he carried on the work of conquest which Mohammed had commenced.

(2) Omar: The second Caliph, Omar, one of Mohammed's generals, who ruled from 634, and subsequent Caliphs, continued to make Islam supreme in other countries. With the watchword, "There is no God but Allah, and Mohammed is his prophet," and the cry, "The Koran or the sword," the fearless warriors carried all before them. Persia, Syria, Egypt, Palestine, North Africa and other parts fell before the conquering "believers," who soon captured all the Asiatic possessions of the Byzantine Empire.

#### *21. What was the Jewish position under Mohammed's successors?*

At first Omar persecuted the Jews and compelled them to wear yellow badges on their clothes

as a mark of humiliation. Afterwards, however, he grew milder in his attitude. The Jews assisted him in his war against the Persians, and he bestowed privileges upon them, and especially on the exilarch, Bostanai. The Jews of Palestine, too, assisted Omar in 638 to conquer that country from the Byzantine Emperor, Heraclius, who had himself captured it from the Persians ten years before, in 628.

Under the fourth Caliph, Ali (Mohammed's cousin and pupil), who ruled from the year 656, the Jews completely regained their freedom and prosperity, which continued for a considerable time. They were protected by the caliphs, became officers and ministers of state, and generally lived in perfect peace.

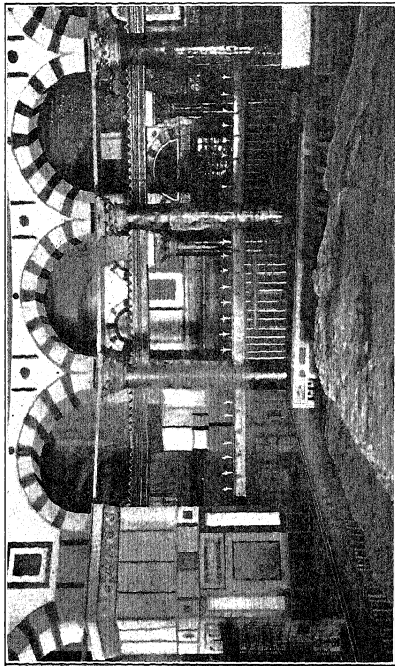
Occasionally, however, the caliphs ill-treated the Jews, and suffered, too, from the incessant wars between rival caliphs. The restrictions of Omar were for a time renewed at the beginning of the eighth century, and again by the great Caliph Haroun Al-Rashid a century later. Under one of the latter's sons, Al-Mamun (ruled 813-833), however, the Jews attained perhaps their most prosperous condition, and during his reign learning flourished and civilization progressed.

. . . . .

The treatment of the Jews by the caliphs in the different countries under their rule varied considerably. The most intolerant of them, however, did not approach the brutal persecution which the Christian Church and Christian rulers extended to the Jews for nearly two thousand years, since the destruction of the Second Temple.







*Interior of the Dome of the Rock*

*22. What is the Mosque of Omar?*

When Omar entered Jerusalem in 638, he built a mosque (the church of Islam) on the site of the Temple. The structure was afterwards demolished by a later caliph, and two splendid new buildings were erected. One was called the Mosque El-Aska (*i. e.* the farthest mosque), and the other the Dome of the Rock, which is still, though incorrectly, called the Mosque of Omar. It is, however, not a mosque at all, being a shrine covering the sacred rock over which stood the Holy of Holies in the Temple. The Dome of the Rock is a beautiful building, and has always been a place of pilgrimage for Moslems, almost as sacred as Mecca itself. Both Jews and Christians were excluded from visiting the buildings until quite recent times.

### III

## KARAISM AND KARAITES

### *1. Who were the Karaites?*

The Karaites were a Jewish sect who followed strictly the teachings of the Bible, accepting only its literal meaning, and opposing bitterly the rabbis of the Talmud in their interpretation of the Bible.

### *2. How did the movement begin?*

During the seventh and eighth centuries, as a result of the establishment of the new faith, Islam, and the conquests of the Moslems, numerous religious sects sprang up in Persia, Arabia and other parts of Asia. The Jews did not escape from this religious and literary upheaval, which the growth of Islam had caused. Toward the end of the eighth century, a movement came into existence, which at first threatened to undermine traditional Judaism. While the bulk of Jewry yielded obedience to the teachings of the rabbis, there appeared a protesting group. Many raged against the complicated and minute laws and regulations of the Talmud. The cry arose, "Back to the Scriptures," and to its few and simple commands, and it would not be downed. The movement was named Karaism, and

the followers Karaites, from the Hebrew verb "kara" meaning "to read," *i. e.* followers of the Bible.

*3. What were the factors that contributed to bringing into existence the Karaite movement?*

Four factors were working to pave the way to bring into existence the movement: (1) The old arguments between the Pharisees and Sadducees had never entirely died down. Since the days of the Temple there had always been groups of Jews who opposed the teachings of the rabbis, and relied for their understanding of religion on the Bible rather than on later tradition. (2) Some of the Arabian Jews—although strongly attached to their faith, for which they had risked their lives and everything they possessed in resisting Mohammed's attack—were, however, ignorant or not well acquainted with the teachings of the rabbis of the Talmud; and, in their desire to retain friendly relations with their Arabian neighbors, they felt hampered by the regulations imposed by the rabbis. (3) Endeavoring to answer the arguments of the Moslems, who hoped to number the Jews among the followers of Islam, these Arabian Jews found it necessary to study the Bible more closely, and thus discovered that many of the laws of the Talmud were not mentioned in the Bible. Many of them were, therefore, persuaded to disregard the teachings of the rabbis. (4) The immediate cause was Anan ben David's failure to become exilarch.

*4. Who was Anan ben David?*

Anan ben David was the nephew of the Exilarch Solomon. About the year 760, the Exilarch Sol-

omon died without leaving any children. As the office of exilarch had been hereditary since the time of Bostanai (640), the position should have gone to the next of kin, to his nephew, Anan ben David, the most capable and learned man of the exilarch's family. The two gaonim of the colleges of Sura and Pumpedita, in whom the power of appointment was vested, passed Anan by, and, in his stead, installed Anan's younger brother in the office. Anan thereupon proclaimed himself exilarch. The Caliph, who regarded Anan's act as rebellious, imprisoned him and condemned him to be put to death. In prison Anan met a Moslem, who advised him to inform the Caliph that he was the founder of a new religious body, and whose religion agreed with Islam on many points. Anan was accordingly released and permitted to go to Palestine.

*5. What was the result of this conflict?*

Anan now attacked with great bitterness the gaonim, who had deprived him of the office of exilarch, and included in his attack and hostility the Talmud and other rabbinical writings. Perhaps he had also, previous to this incident, been of the group that opposed the rabbinical code of laws. Perhaps this was the cause of his rejection. In any event, the treatment intensified his anti-Talmudic tendency, for beliefs are often affected by events. Thereupon, he rallied to his side the various Jewish sects who took their stand only on the Bible, and united the opponents of the rabbis in one strong body. Thus, Anan was the founder of a new movement in Judaism—Karaism, embodying the idea of rejection of all post-Biblical laws. By the watchword "Back to the Scriptures," all law contained in

the Talmud and other rabbinical writings, the product of ages, was rejected.

6. *What was the Book of Precepts?*

In 770 Anan published his *Sefer ha-Mitzvoth* (Book of Precepts) in which he explained his views. He cut himself adrift from all the traditional interpretation of the Torah, but he had to introduce new laws, and start afresh in expounding the Biblical commands. Many of his ideas were borrowed from the Sadducees and Essenes, and even from Moslem writers. He recognized both Jesus and Mohammed as prophets of their religions, but insisted that the Torah had not been repealed by either of them, as it was binding for all time.

7. *What were the laws of the Karaites?*

The rabbis—who, in their interpretation of the laws of the Bible, had added to its rules and regulations many others which, to be sure, were derived directly or indirectly from the Bible itself—had one reason and purpose in mind, namely, to meet the growing demands and needs of practical life. In this, the rabbis, far from being narrow in their view, adopted a wise, progressive spirit. The Karaites, however, in endeavoring to adhere strictly to the Bible, disregarded the policy of the rabbis of adapting the laws of the Bible to the conditions of life in later times. For instance, in interpreting the passage “Ye shall kindle no fire in your habitations on the Sabbath” (Exod. xxxv.3), the rabbis had limited the word “ye” to Jews, so that non-Jews might light fires and lamps for Jews. The Karaites, however, were willing on the

Sabbath to freeze, eat cold food and spend the evening in darkness rather than disobey, as they thought, the literal meaning of the command. Again, in explaining the command: "Abide ye every man in his place" (Exod. xvi.29), the rabbis said that "place" meant "town." The Karaites, however, said that it meant "home"; so, according to their teaching, no one was allowed to leave the house on the Sabbath. Nor was a Karaite permitted on the Sabbath to carry things from one room to another, or wash the face, or make a bed, or wear anything except a shirt.

Medicine was forbidden, even in the case of dangerous illness, on account of the verse: "I am the Lord that healeth thee" (Exod. xv.26). All meat was forbidden, except the deer and the dove; but these might be eaten with milk. The observance of dietary laws, Kashruth, was abolished. The Feast of Chanukah, the second day of festivals, the blowing of the Shofar on New Year were abolished. Neither "Tephilin" nor "Tallith" was worn. Many portions of the synagogue service, including the "Amidah" (eighteen benedictions), were abandoned. The Fast of Ab was observed on the tenth instead of the ninth of Ab; Shabuoth, on Sunday; Purim, a two days' fast.

*8. What was the attitude of the Karaites toward the followers of the Rabbis?*

The Karaites refused to have any connection with the followers of the rabbis. They would not marry into their families or eat at their houses, or even visit them on the Sabbath, as this was regarded as a desecration of the holy day. On the other hand, the rabbis



preached with equal emphasis against the Karaites and excommunicated them. Thus, the Jewish people were divided into two hostile camps.

*9. Did the movement of Karaism spread and why?*

The movement soon spread throughout Babylonia, Persia, Egypt, Palestine and other countries. Afterwards Karaite communities were established in all parts of Europe. The Karaites attracted not only the Jewish sects who were already opposed to the Talmudists, but also the less rigid elements within the ranks of traditional Judaism. The reason was this: There were usually in every community at this time, as in other periods, some people who opposed constituted authority because of some grievance, and others who were inclined to be slack in their religious observance. Thus, the Karaites drew supporters from both these sections.

BENJAMIN NAHAVENDI

*10. Who was Anan's worthy successor?*

The most distinguished Karaite after Anan's death was Benjamin ben Moses Nahavendi, who flourished in Persia at the end of the eighth, and the beginning of the ninth, centuries. He was a very learned and capable man, and was esteemed by the Karaites as much as the founder of the movement. Although he did not support Anan in all of his teachings, he advocated utmost freedom of opinion. No one, he taught, need tie himself to authorities, but might follow his own convictions. "A son may differ from his

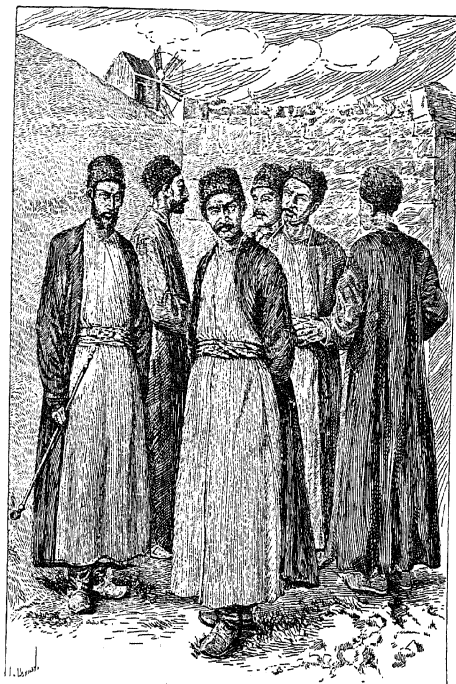
father," he said, "or a pupil from his teacher. Inquiry is a duty, and wrong conclusions resulting from inquiry do not constitute sin."

*11. What was the effect of Nahavendi's teaching upon the movement?*

The declaration of Benjamin Nahavendi with regard to freedom of opinion in religious matters worked havoc and was disastrous to the movement. As a result, numerous sects arose and divisions within the ranks of the Karaite movement took place. Some altered the calendar and declared that the new month should commence, not when the new moon was visible; but when the old one disappeared. (Our present Jewish Calendar, which was drawn up by Hillel II in the year 359, equalizing the lunar and solar year by the addition of a month, the second Adar, seven times in each nineteen years, was thus rejected by the Karaites.) Others decided that Passover must always be observed on Thursday and the Day of Atonement on the Sabbath. Others, again, abandoned many of the Talmudic laws, abolished rabbinical laws relative to marriage and divorce, and instituted prayer seven instead of three times a day. Others abolished the Sabbath and festivals.

*12. Could Karaism prosper and why?*

Under these conditions, Karaism was doomed to failure as a widespread Jewish movement, and was bound to be restricted in its influence. To ruthlessly cast aside so many laws, regulations and rites, endeared by long sanction, and wise and worthy in themselves, was to invite opposition and court unpopularity.



*Karaite Types*



The Karaites, though divided among themselves, had one policy in common: to reject traditional Judaism. The Karaite leaders called upon the people to renounce tradition, and to refuse obedience to the noble and time-honored institutions of Judaism. Thus, one vehement, zealous and cunning Karaite, Abulsari Sahal, addressed the people in the following words: "I come to you in the name of God, in order to bring back the thoughts of the people to true piety, and to warn them not to rely on human institutions, nor to listen to the sayings of the two evil women—the gaonic colleges of Sura and Pumpeditha." These attacks were, indeed, not left unanswered. A champion of true Judaism arose in the person of Saadiah Gaon (892–942), who conquered the foes of traditional Judaism.

*13. What is the present position of the Karaites?*

The Karaites, indeed, ceased to be a living force in Jewry; in fact, they are gradually disappearing. About eight thousand of them were all that lived in Russia in the last century, concentrated in the Crimea. They were all wealthy, for the entire tobacco-industry lay in their hands. With the advent of Soviet Russia into power, however, their real property was confiscated, and thus, as property owners, they were ruined. Their vernacular is Tartar; their activities and influence, zero.

*14. What were the good results of the Karaite movement?*

The Karaite movement had two beneficial results: (1) It helped to promote a widespread research into the Bible as literature, and (2) a revival of He-

brew as a language. The Karaites largely inspired the closer study of Hebrew grammar, punctuation, accents and poetry, and, to a considerable extent, it is due to them that the text of the Bible was settled with greater accuracy.

*15. What is the "Massorah"?*

A standard copy of the Bible, the text of which was fixed about 200 or 300 before the present era, had always been kept in the Temple. Errors, however, had crept into the copies which were made from this text, and there were numerous differences in spelling and punctuation. Accordingly, scholars endeavored to rectify these mistakes, and wrote notes on the text, which were called "Massorah" (tradition), from the Hebrew word meaning "to hand down." The Karaites largely increased the study of the "Massorah." Every sentence, word and even letter of the original writings was examined, re-examined and discussed from every point of view so as to insure the utmost accuracy. Indeed, to Karaite scholars, principally to Moses ben Asher and his son Aaron of Tiberias, we owe very largely the Hebrew text of the Bible in use to-day. We may, therefore, be grateful to the Karaites that they at all events promoted a greater knowledge of the Bible—the Book of Books.

## IV

### SAADIAH GAON 892-942

#### *1. Tell of the early life of Saadiah Gaon.*

Saadiah ben Joseph was born in Egypt in 892 and died at Sura in 942. Nothing whatever is known of his early life and education. However, he must have received a wide and thorough education in his early youth, for when he was only nineteen, he completed his first great work, a Hebrew dictionary, which he called *Agron* (collection), to which an Arabic translation was afterwards added. When he was twenty-two, Saadiah settled in Palestine. Endeavoring to settle a dispute between the rabbis in Palestine and Babylonia concerning the calendar, he went to the colleges of Sura and Pumpedita, and wrote a book called *Book of Festivals*, in which he dealt with the question. In this book he showed great learning, and it largely contributed to his appointment as gaon of Sura College in 928.

#### *2. What was Saadiah's aim in life?*

Saadiah's purpose in life was to strengthen traditional Judaism and make the authority of the rab-

bis in their interpretation of the Bible supreme. Saadiah Gaon was the principal foe of the Karaites. He published many attacks on their teachings, which did more than anything to strengthen the hands of the rabbis and maintain the traditional view of Judaism.

### *3. How did Saadiah accomplish his aim?*

Saadiah Gaon was not content to prove that the Karaites were wrong, but tried to show that the rabbis were right. He accomplished this: (1) By presenting the Bible in such a way that even the most unlearned could understand it. He translated the Bible into Arabic, and added an introduction and commentary to each book. He showed that the Bible was the basis and inspiration for Jewish law, but the Talmud provided the details of religious practice. (2) By writing (when he was only twenty-three) his book called *In Refutation of Anan*, and many other attacks on Karaite teaching. (3) By his book *Emunoth veDeoth* (Book of Beliefs and Opinions), the first systematic presentation of the Jewish religion. He argues that philosophic thought is not opposed to belief in Judaism, for the Bible encourages right thinking, and human reason is necessary to arrive at the truth, assisted by divine revelation. "The sages warn us," he says, "only against one-sided speculation. But, when philosophy works hand in hand with faith, it cannot mislead us." His arguments were so powerful and his reasoning so sound that he conquered the foes of traditional Judaism, and made the authority of the rabbis supreme as the interpreters of Jewish law and tradition.



4. *What is the content of the "Emunoth veDeoth"?*

Saadiyah's *Book of Beliefs and Opinions* is a philosophy of the Jewish religion, which he published in Arabic in 933, and was afterwards translated into Hebrew. In this book he deals with all religious problems—God, creation, revelation, the soul, human obligation, death, resurrection, reward and punishment and the Messiah. He upholds the principle of Unity of God taught by Judaism as against Persian dualism and Christian trinity, and defends the traditional belief of "creation out of nothing" (*creatio ex nihilo*), and the resurrection of the body. He refutes the idea of justification for abandoning the Jewish law, and shows that the divine commandments were given to man by the grace of God as a means to attain the highest blessing. He tries to reconcile man's free will with God's omniscience and the suffering of the righteous with His justice. Thus, Saadiyah Gaon showed himself to be a pioneer and an original worker in the scientific study of Judaism.

5. *What was the position of Sura College prior to Saadiyah's appointment?*

For some time before Saadiyah's appointment as gaon, the college of Sura was put in the shade by its sister college of Pumpeditha. The ambitious gaon of Pumpeditha, Cohen-Zedeck II ben Joseph, desired to make his college supreme, not only over Sura, but over the exilarch as well. He used his influence with the caliph to secure the banishment of the exilarch, and then proposed that the college of Sura should be closed and its members transferred to Pumpeditha. A nominal gaon of Sura, with no real powers, was appointed

in accordance with this plan, but he died suddenly, and it was decided to appoint Saadiah to the position of gaon of Sura, in 928.

*6. Tell of Saadiah as Gaon of Sura.*

With the appointment of Saadiah as gaon, the Sura College was restored to its former brilliance and importance. His learning, his breadth of view and his winning personality attracted many students to his lecture room, and he at once showed great energy and independence. In 930, two years after his appointment as gaon, Saadiah came in conflict with the new exilarch, David ben Zakkai. Saadiah refused to consent to some decision of David, which he did not regard as just. The exilarch excommunicated Saadiah, who in turn excommunicated David. Although Saadiah had strong support, especially in Sura, he was compelled to retire from his position as gaon, and went to Bagdad, where he wrote some of his most important works. Afterwards, in 937, he made peace with the exilarch, and resumed his post as gaon of Sura until he died in 942.

*7. State the characteristic qualities of Saadiah.*

Saadiah Gaon, who wrote hundreds of answers to questions from Jewish communities in all parts of the world, was recognized as the chief authority on Jewish law of that age. He proved himself to be the greatest Jewish writer since Philo (born about 20 B. C. E.) and a pioneer in the field of philosophy of religion. Saadiah also wrote a Hebrew grammar, which made him the oldest known Hebrew gram-

marian. If the period of the gaonim had no other distinguished scholar, it would always be remembered as having produced the Gaon Saadiah.

8. *What became of Sura College after Saadiah's death?*

After Saadiah's death in 942, the college of Sura again declined. Due to insufficient funds to support the college, the gaon of Sura resigned in 948. For some time Pumpeditha College continued to flourish alone, and numbered among its gaonim two men, Sherira and his son Hai, who were worthy successors to many noted principals of the college.

9. *Who were Sherira and Hai?*

(1) Sherira, who came of a family of gaonim, and was proud of belonging to the family of the exilarchs, was appointed gaon of Pumpeditha in 968. He was a learned Talmudist, and his letters in answer to questions have furnished much of the history of the period of the gaonim. In 998, when he was nearly one hundred years old, Sherira Gaon resigned in favor of his son, Hai.

(2) Hai Gaon, like his father, was of noble disposition, and was learned not only in the Talmud, but in Arabic literature and philosophy. He was also a poet, and his book on *Buying and Selling*, which deals with Jewish laws relating to business dealings, is one of the best-arranged works in Jewish literature. Hai Gaon revived the college of Sura by appointing his father-in-law, Samuel ben Chafnai, as gaon. Both Sherira and Hai were much respected, and were called "the fathers and teachers of Israel."

10. *State Hai Gaon's view on education.*

Hai Gaon attached great importance to the education of children. "Make every effort," he said, "to buy books for your children, and provide them with a teacher from their youth. Pay the teacher well, for what you give him, you give your children." He also recommended the acquisition of as much general knowledge as possible. "Study philosophy," he said, "but, if you cannot understand it, then study at least mathematics and medicine."

11. *Tell of the close of the Colleges.*

On the death of Samuel ben Chafnai, in the year 1034, the college of Sura was finally closed. Hai Gaon, who died in the year 1038, and whose death was mourned by the Jews in all parts of the world, was succeeded by Hezekiah as gaon of Pumpeditha. Hezekiah, who was a great-grandson of the Exilarch David ben Zakkai (died in 940), combined the office of gaon of the Pumpeditha College with that of the exilarch. On the death of Hezekiah in 1040, two years after his appointment, both the Pumpeditha College and the office of the Prince of Exile also ceased to exist. Thus ended the glorious period of the gaonim, who kept alive the authority of the traditional Jewish law, after a period of 450 years.

12. *What were the causes for the decline of the Colleges?*

- (1) The center of Jewish activity shifted to Europe.
- (2) Insufficient funds to support the colleges.

(3) Lack of unity and quarrels among the Babylonian Jews.

(4) Standard of Jewish learning declined; Sherira and Hai had no worthy successors (main cause).

NOTE. The Jewish Prayer Book still contains a prayer, in Aramaic, called "Yekum Purkan," recited on the Sabbath after the reading of the Law, in which blessings are bestowed on the teachers and rabbis "in the land of Babylon," on the "resh kallah," the prince of the exile, the judges and the "resh methibta" (*i. e.* the gaonim) and their students. It is a reminder of the interesting times when the colleges of Sura and Pumpeditha flourished and a member of the royal house of David ruled over the Jewish people.

## V

### SYNAGOGUE POETS

*1. What lasting service of the Gaonim came down to us?*

One of the great services of the gaonim, which has had the most lasting results, was to arrange and extend the Synagogue service. They took the traditional form of prayer, originating in the Temple service, and the additions made by the rabbis of the Talmud, put these together into a regular set form, and thus the Jewish prayer book, called "Siddur" (meaning "order" of service), came into being.

*2. Who were the compilers of the Siddur?*

(1) Amram ben Sheshna, gaon of the Sura College (died about 875), who was the author of a large number of decisions on Jewish law, was the first compiler of the Siddur. His prayer book was the first complete order of service for use in synagogue and home, and contained much information on the history of Jewish worship and religious customs. (2) Saadiah Gaon was also the compiler of another prayer book, which was largely based on Amram's compilation. Saadiah's Siddur contained a complete service for weekdays, Sabbaths and festivals, with explanations in Arabic.

He also introduced some of his own poems into the service. These two works of Amram and Saadiah form the basis of the Jewish prayer book in use to-day, which has had a great influence on Jewish religious practice for more than a thousand years.

*3. What was the effect of Moslem rule on the Jews?*

The Moslem rulers, the caliphs, during the gaonic period were lovers of culture, and some of them were more deeply interested in Arabic poetry than in the Koran. They were patrons of learning, and helped to usher in a new era of scholarship. They employed Jews to translate into Arabic the works of Greek and other philosophers, historians and scientists. These favorable conditions brought about a renaissance of Hebrew. Arabic poetry inspired a revival of Hebrew poetry. Israel was again to take up the lyre that he had despairingly hung "on the willows by the waters of Babylon."

*4. What kind of poetry was produced during the Gaonic Period?*

While the Arabian poets devoted themselves to the triumph of the sword and human love, the Hebrew poets knew only of two subjects—praise of God and the sorrows of the Jewish people. Thus, the poetry produced in this period took the form of "Piyutim" (religious poems), which were added by the gaonim to the original service, and are still included in the prayer book of weekdays and especially in that of festivals and fast days. The poets were called "Payetananim" or synagogue poets, who had for their theater

the synagogue and for their audience the congregation assembled for worship.

*5. Who were the first Synagogue poets?*

(1) The first of the synagogue poets was Jose bar Jose of Palestine, who lived in the beginning of the gaonic period. He did not use rhyme or meter, but many of his compositions showed much depth of thought, imagination and tenderness. In a prayer for the New Year, to accompany the blowing of the Shofar, he told, in concise form, the story of Israel's past and the woes of the present, and gave hope of a glorious future. Some of his New Year sonnets, written in acrostic form after the style of certain of the Psalms, are still included in the prayer book, which also contains his poems for the Day of Atonement.

(2) A later synagogue poet was Jannai of Palestine, who introduced rhyme into his verse, and put into the form of poems some of the imaginative explanations of Jewish laws found in the Talmud. His composition, "It was in the Midnight," which recites the wonders performed for the Jewish people at midnight, forms part of the Passover Seder service.

*6. Who was the principal Synagogue poet?*

The principal synagogue poet during the gaonic period was Eleazar Kalir, also of Palestine, who lived in the seventh century, and was a pupil of Jannai. His style was somewhat difficult to follow, but he was a very fruitful writer. While some of his poems have been lost, more than two hundred of them have been preserved in the festival prayer book. Some of them



are acrostic, and others are in the form of riddles, containing clever references to the stories and explanations of the Bible in the Midrash. (Midrash forms a part of the Talmudic literature, explaining the Bible in a homiletic way). The following is one of Kalir's poems for the first day of Tabernacles, entitled "Palms and Myrtles," translated by Alice Lucas:

Thy praise, O Lord, will I proclaim  
In hymns unto Thy glorious name.  
O Thou Redeemer, Lord and King,  
Redemption to Thy faithful bring!  
Before Thine altar they rejoice  
With branch of palm, and myrtle-stem,  
To Thee they raise the prayerful voice—  
Have mercy, save and prosper them.

May'st Thou in mercy many fold,  
Dear unto Thee Thy people hold,  
When at Thy gate they bend the knee,  
And worship and acknowledge Thee:  
Do Thou their hearts' desire fulfill,  
Rejoice with them in love this day,  
Forgive their sins and thoughts of ill,  
And their transgressions cast away.

They overflow with prayer and praise  
To Him, Who knows the future days.  
Have mercy Thou, and hear the prayer  
Of those who palms and myrtle bear.  
Thee, day and night they sanctify  
And in perpetual song adore,  
Like to the heavenly host, they cry:  
"Blessed art Thou for evermore."

7. *What was the effect of the "Piyutim" on the service?*

The introduction of "piyutim" or religious poems altered the character of the service. Singing was introduced into the synagogue, as the religious poems were not recited, but *chanted*. Special tunes were introduced for the various "piyutim." Music, it is true, ever since the days of the Second Temple and before, was an integral part of Jewish worship. Two hundred singers returned from Babylon to sing again the songs of Zion. Yet this was something very different from the chanting of these later days. From this time the chazan (cantor) became an important official, and to some extent replaced the preacher, who explained passages from the Bible and Talmud. The chazan (from the Hebrew word "chazo," meaning "to see") was originally a kind of an overseer or superintendent, who at first fulfilled humble duties for the synagogue and the community. He had charge of the scrolls of the law and attended to the lamps in the synagogue; but later he also assisted in reading the prayers, teaching the children and blowing the Shofar. Still later, as public worship developed, the part taken by the chazan in the service increased; he chanted the prayers, and was thus styled "cantor" or "the messenger of the congregation," who implored God in behalf of the community.

8. *What is the "Josippon"?*

This period of scholarship and literary achievement produced also a Jewish history (a rather inferior one), covering the period from the Exile to the destruction of the Temple. The author is unknown,

but it was written about the year 940. It was written in Arabic and largely based on the history of Josephus (38–100), the Apocrypha and other works in Greek. It was later translated by an Italian scholar from the Arabic into Hebrew and expanded, and was called *Josippon* (pseudo-Josephus). This work served to awaken in the Jews, who were ignorant of the original sources of Jewish history, interest in their glorious past.

## VI

### JEWS IN THE ROMAN EMPIRE

*1. What was the Jewish position in the Roman Empire before the rise of Christianity?*

There were many Jewish settlements in almost every part of the Roman Empire, which covered most of Europe, Syria, Palestine, Egypt and other portions of the northern part of Africa, as well as many dependent states. In many of these countries there were already some Jews even before the conquest of Palestine by the Romans. The Jews did not, as a rule, have full rights of citizenship, but they lived in comparative peace. Judaism was, according to Roman law, a "permitted religion." They were allowed to possess synagogues and cemeteries, and were exempt from military service.

*2. What was the Jewish position after the rise of Christianity?*

With the rise of Christianity, while the Jews of Babylonia were carrying on their ancient traditions in the colleges, their brethren in the Roman Empire were not so fortunate; in fact, they began to experience the terrors of persecution. The Church described the Jews as "perpetual enemies," and the

"Church Fathers" expressed their hostility and bitterness against them. Jerome, though a Hebrew scholar, expressed his hatred of the Jewish people in forcible language. Augustine, who was instrumental in spreading the Christian doctrines and introducing them into England, said that the Jews should have no place in a Christian country, and their synagogues should be destroyed.

*3. What was the attitude of the first Christian Emperor toward the Jews?*

Constantine, called by the Church "the Great" because he was the first Roman Emperor to embrace Christianity, and who commenced his reign in 306, at first gave the Jews the same religious rights as the Christians; but when he joined the Church in 312, he passed severe laws against them. He re-enacted Hadrian's decree prohibiting them from living in, or even entering, Jerusalem, except once a year on the anniversary of the destruction of the Temple. They were forbidden to hold any public office or build new synagogues. In 321 Constantine substituted Sunday as the day of rest instead of the Jewish Sabbath, on which day all business and employment, except agriculture, should cease. Constantine's successor, Constantius, (in 337) banished the rabbis from Palestine, and the Jews were so oppressed by the Roman governor of the Holy Land, that they rebelled in 352, and, in consequence, large numbers of them were killed.

*4. What were the conditions under Emperor Julian?*

Julian, called by the Church "the Apostate," who succeeded Constantius in 361, renounced Chris-

tianity and abolished the laws against the Jews, and even encouraged them to rebuild the Temple. Accordingly, the Jewish people flocked to Zion, contributing gold and silver, silk and other costly articles for the rebuilding of the Temple. In 363, however, six months after the work had been commenced, Emperor Julian died; the work was abandoned and the people were dispersed.

*5. What was the Jewish position under Theodosius (II) the Younger?*

The reign of Theodosius (408–450) was a most unhappy one for the Jewish people. Bishop John Chrysostom strongly denounced the Jews at Antioch, and declared that the Christians should not mix with the Jews, whose souls were the habitations of demons, and whose synagogues were the playgrounds of evil spirits. His fanatical eloquence caused a riot during the Feast of Purim in 405 and the Jews were brutally attacked. The same year the bigoted Cyril, Bishop of Alexandria, led the mob to the Jewish quarter, the synagogues were demolished, the Jewish houses were pillaged, and the Jews were expelled from the city in which they had lived for 700 years, since it was founded by Alexander the Great. Theodosius, however, ordered that the synagogues be restored to the Jews. But a fanatical monk, Simeon Stylites, who lived the life of a hermit and gave up all worldly luxuries except the pleasure of attacking the Jews, induced the Emperor to withdraw his favorable decree to the Jews, who were, he said, “the enemies of heaven.” Theodosius complied with the bigot’s demand in 423. Two years later, he abolished the office of the Jewish Patriarch

or Nasi of Tiberias, a position similar to the exilarch. He also excluded the Jews from holding any public office, prohibited the building of new synagogues and the celebration of certain festivals.

*6. Who were the Arians?*

A Bishop named Arius of Alexandria, believing in religious freedom, founded in the beginning of the fourth century a new Christian sect, called Arians after his name. The people of Germany and other countries of northern Europe, who embraced the Arian form of Christianity, and were themselves oppressed by the Church of Rome, were friendly to the Jews, and had a sympathetic feeling toward other oppressed peoples.

*7. What was the attitude of the Goths toward the Jews?*

At the beginning of the fifth century, the barbarian Goths, who invaded the Roman Empire from northern Europe, were Arian Christians, and at first treated the Jews humanely. The Ostrogoths (*i. e.* Goths of the East) settled in Italy, and the Visigoths (*i. e.* Goths of the West) wandered to France and Spain. Theodoric, the Ostrogothic Emperor in the middle of the fifth century, was a particularly enlightened man. But when the Goths joined the Catholic Church, they were just as intolerant as the Roman Emperors.

*8. What was the division of the Roman Empire?*

At the end of the fourth century the vast Roman Empire was divided into two parts: the eastern or Greek Empire, and the western or Roman Empire.

With the invasion of the Goths, the western Empire ceased to exist. The eastern Empire, which lasted for a thousand years, had its capital at Constantinople (named after Constantine who had made it his capital). It was afterwards called the Byzantine Empire, after Byzantium, the original name of Constantinople. Palestine was included in the eastern Empire.

*9. What was the Jewish position under Byzantine Emperors?*

Byzantine Emperors continually oppressed the Jews. Thus Justinian (527-565) deprived them of citizenship and prohibited them from acting as witnesses against Christians. They were forced to hold certain public offices, but were deprived of the privileges attached to them. The Feast of Passover was not to be held before Easter, and the recital of the "Shema" (proclamation of belief in One God recited by Jews daily) was prohibited, believing it to be a protest against Christian doctrine. Portions of Greek and Latin translations of the Bible were to be read in the synagogue each Sabbath, because in this way Justinian thought he could hasten the conversion of the Jews to Christianity. Jewish schools were broken up, and, in consequence, Jewish study declined. In Palestine and Syria the Jews were subject to continual persecution.

*10. What was the attitude of the Jews toward the Byzantine Emperors?*

Driven to desperation, the Jews sometimes revenged themselves on their persecutors. Thus, when the Persians invaded Palestine, the Jews assisted the



invaders and welcomed them with joy when Jerusalem was captured in 614. For the Jews the Persian conquest was in the nature of a religious war. Churches and monasteries were destroyed, and the Jews hoped to repossess the Holy Land. The Persian King, however, did not carry out his promise to hand over Jerusalem to the Jews. The Jews accordingly entered into a treaty with the Byzantine Emperor, Heraclius, by which, in return for protection, they would assist him to recapture the country. In 628 (fourteen years later) the Persians were accordingly driven out of Palestine. At first Heraclius kept his promise to grant the Jews freedom, but afterwards the monks induced him to persecute them. The old laws against the Jews were again renewed, and they were once more forbidden to enter Jerusalem.

*11. What was generally the position of the Jews in the Byzantine Empire?*

Occasionally a tolerant Emperor arose, but most of the Byzantine rulers oppressed and bitterly persecuted the Jews. Their lot was intolerable.

## VII

### THE FRANKISH EMPIRE

500-1000

*1. When did the Jews settle in France?*

Jews settled in France probably as early as the time of the Roman Republic, and Jewish prisoners were brought there after the conquest of Palestine and the succeeding wars. They were to be found as far as Paris, but settled more numerous in the south, where they founded communities at Marseilles, Beziers, Toulouse, Montpellier, Lunel, Posquieres, Narbonne and other cities. Jewish communities were also to be found in Belgium, the Rhine provinces of Germany, and other portions of northern Europe.

*2. What was the Jewish position in France and Germany?*

While the Jews were being persecuted by the Byzantine Emperors in the East, their brethren in France and Germany had, on the whole, reasonable liberty under the Franks, who adopted the Arian form of Christianity at the end of the sixth century. They

engaged in trade and shipping, established colleges, owned land, practised medicine and took an active part in the wars and administration of the countries in which they lived.

*3. What was the attitude of the Church towards the Jews?*

Some of the Jews appear to have been on such good terms with the Christian clergymen, that Church Councils ordered the clergy not to eat meals at Jewish homes. They considered it undignified for Christians to eat Jewish food, while the Jews refused to eat Christian dishes, thus making it appear that Christian clergy were inferior to the Jews.

*4. What was the Jewish position in France under the Catholic Church?*

When France came under the sway of the Catholic Church, the Church Councils again forbade Christians to eat Jewish meals, and also prohibited Jews from appearing in the streets during Easter, because then "their appearance is an insult to Christianity." One Bishop at Clermont in the south of France, who unsuccessfully tried to convert the Jews, called upon the people to attack the synagogues, which were razed to the ground. The Jews were then given the choice of baptism or leaving the district. The mob killed several of them, and a number then became baptized in the year 576, while others fled to Marseilles. In 629 King Dagobert, a bigoted fanatic, decreed that the whole of the Jews of France should become Christians or be put to death. They suffered, however, neither fate.

## CHARLEMAGNE (Ruled 764–814)

*5. Who was Charlemagne?*

The wise and tolerant Charlemagne, who ruled from 764 to 814, was the founder of the Frankish Empire, which extended from the Mediterranean to the North Sea and from the Atlantic Ocean to the river Elbe. It comprised France, a large portion of Germany and Italy, Belgium and Holland. Charlemagne's kingdom became far more powerful and important than the Byzantine Empire, which was ruled from Constantinople.

*6. What was the Jewish position under Charlemagne?*

Charlemagne was more than a great conqueror; he was a great man. He fully deserved his name Charlemagne, which means Charles the Great. He was broad minded and enlightened. Under his rule, the Jews entered upon an era of liberty and prosperity. Although he was a warm supporter of the Catholic Church and helped to establish the supremacy of the Popes, he disregarded the decrees of the Church against the Jews, and inflicted heavy punishments on anyone who oppressed them.

Charlemagne also employed many learned Jews at his court. A Jew named Isaac was sent by him as ambassador to the Caliph Haroun Al-Rashid at Bagdad in 797. At Charlemagne's request the Caliph sent him a learned Jew from Babylonia, named Machir, who was appointed by the Emperor as the head of the Jewish community of Narbonne.

7. *In what trade were the Jews engaged at this time?*

The Jews were the principal business men of Europe at this time, and Charlemagne encouraged their trade. The nobles were mostly engaged in warfare, the slaves and serfs in agriculture, and the ordinary freemen in handicrafts. The Jews were excluded from all these occupations. So for this reason, and also because of their wide dispersion and connection with various countries, they naturally turned to commerce. The Jews of the Frankish Empire were free to travel, and many of them settled in Bohemia, Poland and other countries.

LOUIS "THE GENTLE" (Ruled 814-840)

8. *Who was Louis "The Gentle"?*

Louis was Charlemagne's son and succeeded his father. He was a tolerant and enlightened monarch like his father, and was called "The Gentle." He ruled from 814 to 840.

9. *What was the Jewish position under Louis?*

Louis, as his father Charlemagne, protected the Jews in every way in his power, and appointed a special officer, called "Master of the Jews," to watch their interests. The Jews were permitted to employ Christians, to trade freely, build synagogues wherever they wished and settle disputes in their own courts. Even the market-day was changed from Saturday to Sunday in towns where there was a large number of Jews. Louis' second wife, Judith, was also most

friendly to the Jews. Judith and the Emperor encouraged Jewish learning, and the writings of Philo, Josephus and other Jewish authors were studied by many Christians.

*10. Who was Bishop Bodo?*

It was, indeed, a golden age for the Jews of the Frankish Empire. They were permitted to discuss Christianity and their own religion freely in the hearing of Christians. Many Christians visited the synagogues, and were much impressed with the services and sermons of the Jewish preachers. Christian clergymen were not ashamed to adopt their explanations of the Bible from Jewish scholars. Under these conditions, some Christians became Jews. One of these converts was Bishop Bodo, the Emperor's confessor, who became convinced of the truths of Judaism on a journey to Rome, where he became disgusted with the immoral life of the Christian clergy. Bodo adopted the Jewish name of Eleazar, and settled in Saragossa in Spain, where he married a Jewess.

*11. Who was Bishop Agobard?*

The tolerant attitude of Emperor Louis toward the Jews served to increase the envy and hatred of the Catholic clergymen toward them. One of the most bitter Jew-haters was Agobard, Bishop of Lyons. He urged the Christians to have nothing to do with the Jews, whom he attacked in many violent speeches and sermons. The Emperor ordered him to desist, but this had no effect on the fanatical bishop. In 829 Agobard called a meeting of bishops at Lyons to consider the best means of humbling the Jews. They sent a letter

to the Emperor, asking that all the privileges granted to the Jews should be abolished. Louis replied: "Divine law bids me protect my subjects who share my belief, but it nowhere forbids me to be just toward those who differ from me." In 830 Agobard joined a conspiracy to dethrone the Emperor, but the fanatical bishop, who failed in his object, was himself deposed.

### CHARLES THE BALD

*12. What was the Jewish position under Charles the Bald?*

Charles the Bald, son of Louis, continued the toleration shown by his father and grandfather, and employed a Jewish doctor named Zedekiah and also a Jewish minister named Judah. The Catholic clergy still tried to introduce the old restrictions against the Jews, but the Emperor refused to listen to them.

*13. What was the effect of the division of the Frankish Empire upon the Jews?*

In 843 the Treaty of Verdun divided the Frankish Empire into France, Germany, Lorraine and Italy and made them independent states. The Emperor's power decreased, while that of the fanatical clergy increased. The people were incited by the clergy to attack the Jews at Beziers, Toulouse and other French towns. The Jews of Toulouse suffered a special humiliation. The counts had the privilege of publicly giving the president of the Jewish community a box on the ears on Good Friday. One year a Christian clergyman asked permission to perform the task, and the blow

which he gave was so violent that the president was killed. Later, the box on the ears was changed to a payment of an annual tax. At Beziers it was the custom to stone the houses of the Jews at Easter time. This was also abandoned for an annual payment.

*14. What was the Jewish position after Charles the Bald?*

After the reign of Charles the Bald, the golden age of complete freedom which had been commenced by the great Charlemagne no longer existed. Occasionally there were intervals of freedom, but usually the rulers of France, Germany and Italy regarded the Jews as their private property, to be taxed and treated as they chose. The Church was supreme, and its decrees against the Jews became the law of the land.



## VIII

### SPAIN UNDER THE VISIGOTHS

*1. What are the legends of the early settlement of the Jews in Spain?*

It is said that Tubal, the son of Japhet and grandson of Noah, founded the Kingdom of Spain; that Solomon's treasurer Adoniram died there; that after the destruction of the Temple by Nebuchadnezzar, Jews went to Spain; that Pyrrhus, captain of King Cyrus of Persia, brought many Jews to Spain; that Toledo and several other towns in Spain were built by Jews, who had commercial relations with the Phoenicians; that the Jews of Spain sent a letter to the Sanhedrin at Jerusalem protesting against the crucifixion of Jesus; that the Roman governor of Spain asked Titus to send him some noble Jewish families, and among them was one named Baruch, a skilled weaver of curtains for the Temple.

*2. What is the theory of the derivation of the name of Spain?*

There is a theory that the word Spain is derived from the Hebrew word "Shaphan" meaning coney, on account of the numerous coneyholes which the Jews found when they first arrived there. The Hebrew name for

Spain is "Sepharad," and the plural "Sephardim" is the name by which the descendants of Spanish Jews are still called.

*3. What is certain of the early settlement of Jews in Spain?*

All the above mentioned traditions have no historic proof. It is certain, however, that there were Jews in Spain as early as the Roman Republic. Vespasian, Titus, Hadrian and other Roman rulers sent many Jewish prisoners to Spain, where they were afterwards ransomed. Granada and Tarragona were each originally called "Jews' Town," having been almost entirely inhabited by Jews.

*4. What was the Jewish position prior to the invasion of the Visigoths?*

Although the decrees of the Roman emperors applied also to Spain as part of their dominions, the Church authorities, however, were intolerant towards the Jews. The Council of Elvira (near Granada) in 320 forbade Christians to marry Jews, or eat with them, or have any other friendly relations with them.

*5. What was the attitude of the Visigoths towards the Jews?*

The invasion of the Visigoths in Spain changed the Jewish position for the better. The Visigoths, who invaded Spain at the beginning of the fifth century, were Arians, and therefore regarded every Catholic a Roman and consequently an enemy, and thus declined to carry out the decrees of the Catholic Church. The Jews were accordingly not molested, and many of them

occupied public offices. But when the Visigothic kings joined the Catholic Church, they commenced to persecute the Jews.

*6. What was the Jewish position under the first Catholic Visigothic King?*

Under the rule of the first Catholic Visigothic King, Reccared, the third Church Council of Toledo in 589 prohibited Jews from employing Christians, or holding public offices in which they could inflict punishment on Christians, or chanting Psalms at funerals. These decrees, however, were difficult to enforce, and the Jews were, indeed, protected from attack by the Arian Bishops and Visigothic nobles.

*7. Who introduced the first persecution of Jews in Spain?*

The Visigothic King Sisebut in 612 was the first to persecute the Jews in Spain. He renewed Recared's decrees and tried to convert the Jews by force. He decreed that Jews who would not become baptized, in addition to being expelled, were to have a public flogging of one hundred lashes, their hair cut off, their property confiscated and their children seized and brought up as Christians in monasteries. Many thousands of Jews consented to be baptized, but the stronger-minded fled to France, Africa and other countries.

*8. What was the situation after Sisebut?*

Sisebut's successor was a more liberal monarch. He repealed the laws against the Jews, and, in consequence, many of the exiles returned, and the con-

verts again openly practiced their faith. Their period of liberty, however, did not last long. The Fourth Council of Toledo in 633, though it ordered against conversion by force, decreed that Jews who had been baptized should be forcibly prevented from practicing Judaism, and their children be placed in monasteries. The penalty for disobedience was slavery. Then again a convert who even spoke to a Jew was liable to be made a slave, and the Jew publicly flogged. Jews were not allowed to hold public offices, nor act as witnesses.

### 9. *What was the Visigothic Code?*

The Visigothic Code (*Fuero Juzgo*) was passed in 634, providing, in addition to previous laws, that (1) Jews should not observe the Sabbath, Passover, or other Jewish festivals, (2) nor make any distinction in food, (3) nor trade with Christians. The penalty for disobedience was slavery and confiscation of property. (4) In 638 it was again decreed that Jews should be compelled to be baptized or leave the country. Subsequent church councils and kings decreed that (5) Jews were to spend both Jewish and Christian holidays with Christian clergymen so that they might be prevented from observing the former and be compelled to keep the latter, and (6) when they set out on a journey, they had to have a certificate that they were good Christians, and carry a copy of the laws against them so that they could not plead ignorance as an excuse. (7) In 653 it was again decreed that baptized Jews who practiced Judaism should be beheaded, burned alive, or stoned to death.

*10. Was the Visigothic Code enforced and why?*

It was impossible to enforce such harsh laws. The Jews were too valuable a portion of the community, and the nobles often protected them, desiring to utilize their money and intelligence. Thus many baptized Jews openly practiced Judaism, and others observed it in secret.

*11. Was their position satisfactory?*

Despite the fact that the Visigothic Code could not be enforced, the Jews had a miserable lot. Driven to despair, they entered at the end of the seventh century into an alliance with their brethren in Africa with the object of overthrowing the Visigothic empire. The conspiracy, however, was discovered. In consequence, many Jews were sold as slaves and their children brought up as Christians.

## IX

### SPAIN UNDER THE MOSLEMS

711

*1. Tell of the Jewish co-operation in the invasion of the Moslems in Spain.*

Although the Jews failed in their conspiracy to overthrow the Visigothic empire at the end of the seventh century, an opportunity, however, soon occurred for them to revenge themselves on their oppressors. In 711 an army of Moslems from Morocco and other parts of North Africa, led by their general, Tarik, invaded Spain, defeated the last Visigothic King, Roderic, and conquered the Visigoths. Everywhere the invaders were assisted by the Jews, who received their liberators with great rejoicing, and large numbers joined the army. The Moslem generals left each town as it was captured in the safe keeping of the Jews.

*2. Did the Visigoths deserve their defeat?*

The Visigoths, indeed, deserved their defeat. They were an ignorant, intolerant people, who contributed nothing to civilization, either in art, literature, or commerce, or any other department of life.

3. *Did Tarik establish a united government?*

The original Moslem settlers who invaded Spain were composed partly of Arabs, who had gone to Africa from their own country after the rise of Islam, and partly of Berbers, a semi-savage race, natives of Morocco, who had been conquered by the Arabs and converted to Islam. The Berbers (who were the real Moors) quarrelled with the Arabs, who in turn were also divided among themselves. Under these conditions Tarik could not establish a united, strong government, and there was even some danger of losing Spain at the hands of the Christians, who were eagerly desirous of recapturing it at any opportunity.

4. *Who was the founder of the Moslem rule in Spain?*

In 755 Abd Al-Rachman I, a member of the family of the Omayyad Caliphs of Bagdad, arrived in Spain from Africa. He soon put an end to the quarrels among the Arabs and Berbers, restored order, obtained control of the country, and in 756 established his kingdom at Cordova, in Andalusia, the province comprising a large area of southern Spain.

5. *How long did the Moslem rule last in Spain?*

The Moslem rule in Spain existed about 800 years. The Omayyads ruled over Moslem Spain for nearly 300 years, and were succeeded by the Almora-vids, who ruled in the eleventh century, during the entire period of which Spanish Jewry enjoyed complete freedom. The Almohads, who came from Africa in the twelfth century (1148) and invaded Spain, ill-treated the Jews, but it was not till the end of the fifteenth century that Moslem rule in Spain was finally

ended. With the invasion of the Moslems in Spain, the "Golden Age" for Spanish Jewry began.

NOTE. On his march to Spain, Tarik first landed at Gibraltar, which was named after him, *i. e.* Gebel-al-Tarik, the Hill of Tarik.



## X

### THE GOLDEN AGE IN SPAIN

#### *1. Why is this period called the "Golden Age"?*

When Jewish scholarship declined in the Colleges of Sura and Pumpedita, it acquired a new vigor in Spain. Here we find the most glorious period of Jewish prosperity and learning in the Middle Ages. Here lived and taught and sang the greatest Jewish rabbis, philosophers, scientists and poets. Here, too, Jews acquired the highest positions at the courts of caliphs and kings. It was Spain which succeeded Babylonia as the center of Jewish culture.

#### *2. How long did the "Golden Age" last in Spain?*

For the greater part of 600 years, apart from local disturbances, Spain became to the Jews an earthly Paradise, where they could work and study and prosper in peace and happiness. It is not surprising that such conditions should have produced great men—the most illustrious names in Jewish history. It is they who made the "golden age" in Spain a period of unsurpassed brilliance and a source of great pride to their brethren for all ages.

3. *What were the causes for this Age of Liberty?*

(1) Owing to assistance they gave to the Moslem conquerors, the Jews received welcome privileges from them, and entered upon a new era of liberty. (2) The Jews were fortunate that the caliphs and emirs were very enlightened men, who not only granted complete religious liberty, but encouraged learning and literature. Poets were especially honored, and a clever poem was often regarded with almost as great favor as a victorious battle. Challenges to personal combat and declarations of war were sometimes written in poetry, and even books of science were composed in verse.

4. *Name two Caliphs who contributed much to this Golden Age.*

The literary movement was much assisted by two Caliphs who ruled in the tenth century—Abd al-Rachman III, who ruled from 912 to 961, and his son, Al-Hakem II, who ruled from 961 to 976. Both showed great favor to the Jews, and encouraged learning. Abd al-Rachman III was the greatest Moslem monarch in Spain, and during his time Spain became the mightiest and the most cultured country in Europe. Commerce, agriculture, education and literature all reached a high point, and there is no doubt that the Jews of Spain largely contributed to this success.

CHASDAI IBN-SHAPRUT  
915-970

5. *Tell of the life of Chasdai Ibn-Shaprut.*

Chasdai Ibn-Shaprut was born about 915 at Jaen and died about 970. His father was a wealthy,

learned Jew, who settled later in Cordova. Chasdai acquired in his youth a knowledge of Hebrew, Arabic and Latin, and he was also a doctor. Abd al-Rachman III appointed him his private physician. By his attractive manner, learning, high character and great ability, Chasdai gained the Caliph's confidence to such an extent that he became principal adviser at the Moslem court. Although he did not bear the title Vizier, Chasdai exercised most of the functions of the office, in addition to dealing with trade and financial matters.

Chasdai proved himself to be the most successful diplomat of his time. When the Caliph's ambassadors visited other countries, he accompanied them and assisted their work by his sound advice, clever schemes and knowledge of language. Again, when foreign ambassadors came to Cordova, Chasdai received them, negotiated with them and made alliances with their governments.

*6. Tell of Chasdai's patronage of Jewish learning.*

Chasdai, in addition to his active engagement in important affairs of state, was also a patron of Jewish learning. He generously contributed to the colleges of Sura and Pumpedita, in addition to encouraging Jewish learning in Cordova. In recognition of his princely support, the gaonim of the Babylonian colleges conferred upon him the title "Resh Kallah." Chasdai also gathered around him Jewish poets and scholars. It was said that "the poets began to sing in Chasdai's time." They breathed new life into the Hebrew language and poetry, and much Jewish poetry resulted from the rivalry among the various principal poets and their pupils.

7. *What is the characteristic note of this new poetry?*

The Jewish poetry composed during the gaonic period, which was mainly limited to compositions for synagogue worship, was somewhat gloomy in character, since the Hebrew poets then knew only of two subjects: Praise of God and the sorrow of the Jewish people; for instance, the "piyutim" (religious poems) of Jose bar Jose, Jannai and Eleazar Kalir. This new poetry, however, began to assume a more joyful note. Arabic poetry inspired a revival of Hebrew poetry, and thus the Jewish poets took as their model the Arab poets, who sang of human love and the triumphs of the sword, although they did not slavishly follow the Arabs. The favorite themes of the new poetry now became panegyric (poems in praise of some person or event) and satire, but it did not lose sight of religious poetry. The imposing personality of Chasdai, his character, his high position, his deeds and princely generosity, were also new themes of poetic creations for the Jewish poets.

8. *Name two principal poets of the new poetry and state their contributions.*

(1) Menachem ben Isaac Ibn-Saruk and Dunash ben Labrat were the two principal writers of the new poetry, who were invited by Chasdai to come to Cordova. In addition to his poems, Menachem compiled a complete Hebrew dictionary, to which he added rules of grammar. He was the first to set out the roots of Hebrew words, and separate the prefixes and suffixes. This book was used as a text-book in other coun-

tries. 2. Dunash ben Labrat was a more successful poet than Menachem, and was the first to use meter. One of his compositions is included in the Jewish prayer book—the portion of the grace read after a wedding banquet, each sentence of which commences with the initials of the author's name: Dunash.

*9. What was the immediate cause for Cordova becoming the Jewish world-center of culture?*

Owing to the decline of the college of Sura, four rabbis were sent to collect contributions from the Jews in other parts of the world. On their journey, they were captured by a Moslem admiral of Cordova, who sold them as slaves, but they were all ransomed by the Jewish communities where they landed. One of the four rabbis was Moses ben Enoch, who was brought to Cordova with his little son Enoch. The people of Cordova, who ransomed him, had no idea that Moses was a great scholar, nor did the rabbi himself at first reveal his knowledge. He went about the town shabbily dressed, like any poor man.

One day Rabbi Moses and his son went to the Jewish College of Cordova, where a discussion was taking place on a difficult passage in the Talmud. No one seemed to be able to explain the passage satisfactorily, and the head of the college, Rabbi Nathan, was not a very learned man. Rabbi Moses offered his explanation. Although the students did not know who the shabby stranger was, they at once recognized him as a great scholar, for his explanation was so clear that everyone understood it. Rabbi Nathan was so impressed that he rose from his seat and, addressing the

students, said: "I can no longer be your rabbi. The stranger in rags is my master, and I am his pupil." Rabbi Moses was accordingly appointed head of the college. Chasdai became the generous patron of Rabbi Moses, and at his own expense obtained copies of the Talmud from the Babylonian colleges, and distributed them among the students of Cordova College.

The Cordova College, under Rabbi Moses, soon attained a position of great importance. Students flocked from all parts to be taught by him, and communities, instead of sending their questions to Sura and Pumpedita, despatched them to Cordova. Rabbi Moses performed all the functions of a gaon. He ordained rabbis, acted as a judge of appeal in Jewish matters, and interpreted questions of Jewish law.

Thus, Chasdai and Rabbi Moses, assisted by the support which the enlightened Caliphs, Abd al-Rachman III and his son Al-Hakem II, gave to learning and literature generally, soon made Cordova the Jewish world-center of scholarship and culture.

*10. Characterize the personality of Chasdai Ibn-Shaprut.*

The noble man Chasdai was not only a prince of diplomats but a prince of Judaism. He showed that riches and high office were not inconsistent with Jewish scholarship and warm attachment to the Jewish faith and people.

## XI

### THE CHAZARS

#### *1. Who were the Chazars?*

The Chazars were composed of Turks, Slavs, Bulgars and various tribes from the Caucasus Mountains. They lived in southern Russia, near the river Volga, on the shores of the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea and near the Caucasus Mountains. About the beginning of the eighth century, the King of the Chazars, named Bulan, had a dream in which an angel promised him might and glory, and called upon him to worship God. Thereupon, Bulan proclaimed his belief in One God. When the Moslem Caliph and Christian Emperor heard of this, they were anxious to convert Bulan to their religion. Bulan accordingly arranged for a religious discussion before him, in which a Jew, a Christian and a Moslem took part. When the Christian and Moslem representatives presented their faiths, Bulan asked them each separately which of the other two religions they considered better. They both said Judaism. Bulan, therefore, decided that Judaism must be the true religion. He accepted Judaism, and was followed by the principal nobles and a large number of his people. Under Bulan's successor, Obadiah, synagogues and Jewish schools were established, and

the people were instructed in the Bible, Talmud and Hebrew language. Little was known about them, and the Jews in other countries imagined that they were the remnants of the lost ten tribes.

*2. What authentic information do we have concerning them?*

Chasdai Ibn-Shaprut, whose interest in the Jewish people was not limited to the Jews in Spain, upon hearing of the existence of a Jewish kingdom in Russia, sent a letter to the Jewish king whose name was Joseph, and asked for full information concerning the origin, laws, customs and history of the Chazars. King Joseph replied in cordial terms, giving many particulars about his remarkable kingdom.

*3. How long did the Chazar Kingdom last?*

Soon after King Joseph wrote to Chasdai, the kingdom of the Chazars was conquered by the Russians, and in 1016 the only portion of their territory that remained was the Crimea, which was still called the "Land of the Chazars." Joseph was the last ruler with any power, and the members of the royal family went to Spain. Most of the Chazars remained in their homes.



## XII

### SAMUEL IBN-NAGDELA

993-1055

*1. Tell of the early life of Samuel Ibn-Nagdela.*

Samuel ha-Levi ben Joseph Ibn-Nagdela was born in 993 at Cordova, where he learned Hebrew grammar and Arabic, and he studied the Talmud at the Jewish college under Rabbi Enoch, son and successor of Rabbi Moses ben Enoch. When he was twenty years old, civil war broke out between the Berbers and Arabs, and the Moslem kingdom was split up into a number of small states, each being ruled by its own emir. Owing to the continual strife and disturbances, the Jews were obliged to leave Cordova, and Samuel settled in the port of Malaga. Here he opened a little shop as a chemist, and in his spare time studied the Talmud, Latin, Arabic and Castilian.

*2. Tell of the incident that made Samuel Vizier.*

Malaga belonged to the newly formed Moslem state, the Kingdom of Granada, whose Emir was named Habus. The Vizier of Granada had a palace next to Samuel's little shop, and the confidential slave of this Vizier had employed Samuel, who was a skilful

penman, to write his letters. The Vizier, who once happened to see the letters, was so impressed by the writing that he asked to meet the young chemist. Upon meeting Samuel, the Vizier at once (in 1025) made him his private secretary. The Vizier soon discovered that Samuel could not only write letters, but had great insight into political affairs, and accordingly consulted his secretary on all important matters. Two years later the Vizier fell ill, and on his death-bed, he confessed to the Emir, Habus, that his success had been mainly due to his Jewish secretary. Habus accordingly appointed Samuel Vizier in 1027.

*3. Describe Samuel's political position?*

Although Samuel only bore the title Vizier, he was, in reality, the uncrowned King of Granada. As the Emir did not trouble himself very much with the affairs of the government, he left these matters very largely in the hands of his Vizier Samuel, who thus became the real ruler of Granada. This was even more so the case under Badis, the son of Habus, who became Emir after his father's death in 1037. This pleasure-loving young prince paid little attention to the affairs of the kingdom, and left everything to Samuel. Both Habus and Badis did not regret their choice, for Samuel proved to be a wise minister, and, under his rule, the Kingdom of Granada flourished, and became one of the most powerful states.

*4. Describe and illustrate Samuel's character.*

In his high position, with all his power and glory, Samuel remained the same pious, modest and gentle scholar that he had always been. By the gentle-

ness of his manners and the generosity of his actions he disarmed his enemies, who were jealous of his power and prejudiced because of his Jewish birth. The following story is an illustration of his character. Near the Emir's palace there lived a Moslem spice dealer, who, one day, as Samuel was in the company of the Emir, poured insults and curses upon him. Enraged, Habus commanded Samuel to punish the insolent spice dealer by having his tongue cut out. Samuel, however, silenced the angry tongue of the spice dealer by sending him a present, and thus converted his curses into blessings. When the Emir and Samuel again passed the spice dealer, he greeted them most courteously, to the surprise of the Emir, who asked Samuel why he had not complied with his order. Thereupon, Samuel replied: "I have done as you commanded; I have torn out his angry tongue and have given him instead a kind one."

*5. State the characteristic qualities of Samuel.*

Samuel Ibn-Nagdela combined in his own personality the qualities of the three men that preceded him. Like Chasdai Ibn-Shaprut, he was a great statesman and patron of learning; like Rabbi Moses ben Enoch, a scholarly Talmudist; and, like Dunash ben Labrat, a poet and grammarian.

*6. What are Samuel's literary contributions?*

Samuel composed a book called *Mebo* (preface), explaining clearly the methods of the Talmud. This he introduced by giving a list of all the principal rabbis, beginning with the compiler of the Mishnah down to his own day. He also wrote a commentary to

the whole Talmud for religious practice, a book on philosophy, books on Hebrew grammar, and a number of proverbs and thoughtful maxims. He was also a poet, and some of his hymns found their way into the service of the Synagogue. He was, too, a rabbi, and presided over the Jewish College of Granada, where he delivered lectures on the Talmud and decided questions on Jewish law. Samuel was called Nagid, *i. e.* prince, and he was just as much the religious leader of the Jewish community as he was the principal head of the Caliph's government.

*7. Name two grammarians in Samuel's time and state their contributions.*

The two grammarians were Judah Chayuj and Jonah Ibn-Janach. Judah Chayuj (950) was the first scientific Hebrew grammarian, and the first to recognize that the roots of the Hebrew words consist of three letters, and that several Hebrew consonants are also vowels. He wrote several grammatical works in Arabic. Jonah Ibn-Janach (990–1050), who was also a doctor, philosopher and logician, was the creator of the Hebrew syntax. He was also one of the first Bible critics in the modern sense. He aroused most opposition by declaring that many passages of the Bible were difficult to understand owing to the writing of a wrong word, letter or syllable. He explained over two hundred passages in this way. Although he was convinced of the divine inspiration of the Bible, he took the view that even the language of the Bible must be interpreted according to ordinary grammatical rules.

JOSEPH IBN-NAGDELA  
1031-1066*8. Tell of the early life of Joseph Ibn-Nagdela.*

Samuel Ibn-Nagdela died in 1055 at Granada, mourned by his brethren everywhere, and was succeeded by his son Joseph. Joseph's life was short and ended tragically. Although he was only twenty-four years old on his father's death, the Emir Badis made him Vizier, and the Jewish community appointed him Chief Rabbi and Nagid. Joseph had shown brilliant qualities and followed in his father's footsteps in clever government and promotion of Jewish learning. He was, however, sometimes, unlike his father, haughty and proud, and he appointed so many of his relatives and other Jews to official positions, that he aroused much jealousy among the Moslems, who also envied his princely splendor. Joseph also lost the favor of the Emir because he would not consent to a massacre of Arabs which Badis, who was a Berber, had planned. His enemies also determined to get rid of him. They spread the report that he planned to kill Badis and seize the throne himself. Accordingly, in 1066, Joseph, who was only 35 years old, was killed and his body crucified in front of one of the gates of Granada.

*9. When did the first persecution of the Jews by the Moslems in Spain take place?*

In consequence of the murder of Joseph, a general attack on the Jewish community of Granada followed, and more than 1,500 Jewish families, comprising 4,000 Jews, were massacred and their houses

destroyed. This was the first persecution of the Jews by the Moslems in Spain since the conquest by them 350 years before.

*10. Were the Jews deprived of their liberty since?*

No. Fortunately, the attack did not extend beyond Granada. Refugees were received in other Moslem states, where the Jews still had freedom, and also in Christian kingdoms. The Emir of Saragossa had a Jewish Vizier, the Emir of Seville employed a Jewish astronomer, and there were many Jewish doctors and tax collectors at the Moslem courts.

### XIII

## SPAIN UNDER THE ALMORAVIDS

1086-1148

*1. What was the Jewish position under the Almoravids?*

At the end of the eleventh century (1086) the Almoravids, a Berber race, who also came from North Africa, united Moslem Spain under their rule, at the head of which was their first Caliph, Yusuf Ibn-Tashfin. The Almoravids were not patrons of poets and scholars like the Omayyad Caliphs. They were, however, lovers of justice, and they permitted the Jews to live under the happiest conditions.

*2. Who were Solomon Ibn-Almuallem and Abraham Ibn-Kamnial?*

The second Almoravid Caliph, Ali, (1103-1143) son and successor of Yusuf Ibn-Tashfin, showed his friendly attitude toward the Jews by appointing numerous Jewish officials. Solomon Ibn-Almuallem was Ali's physician and Vizier. He was also a poet, and it was said of his verse that it would have rendered eloquent the lips of a dumb man, and would have made the eyes of the blind to see.

Abraham ben Meir Ibn-Kamnial was also physician

and Vizier to Ali. He was the patron of Moses Ibn-Ezra and other Jewish poets of the time, who highly praised his nobility of character, generosity and interest in his Jewish brethren.

*3. Who succeeded the Almoravids?*

The Almoravid dominion did not last long and soon declined. It was superseded in Spain by the Almohads in 1148.

SPAIN UNDER THE ALMOHADS

1148-1212

*4. Who were the Almohads?*

Owing to the fact that religious laxity had then penetrated the western parts of the Moslem world to such an extent that the most important tenets of their faith were utterly rejected, a certain fanatic named Abdallah Ibn-Tumart of North Africa, who believed that civilization and culture involved looseness of conduct, preached about the year 1112 to the Moslems of Africa simplicity of living and dress, and opposed the encouragement of poetry, music, scientific knowledge and the enjoyment of the pleasures and refinement of life. Abdallah was a religious enthusiast and a man of strong personality. He soon gathered around him a large band of followers, composed of less civilized Berbers, and founded a new sect called Almohads, meaning Unitarians, believers in One God.

*5. Were not all Moslems believers in One God?*

Yes. All Mohammedans were believers in One God, and their watchword was "There is no God but



Allah" (meaning, in Arabic, God), and, therefore, differed in this respect from the Christians. The idea of Allah, however, had then become material and gross in the minds of the masses. God was spoken of, and was conceived by many of them, as a human being, possessing form and body, and they were inclined to depict God in a crude way. Abdallah then appeared upon the scene as a sort of a reformer and tried to give to his people a purer idea of God. Now then, if that only had characterized his movement, all had been well. His enthusiasm, however, reached the anti-climax of fanaticism. With great zeal he denounced not only luxury but even protested against fine and liberal arts. His band of followers grew in power and overthrew the Almoravid Kingdom in Africa, and compelled all the inhabitants to become Moslems or leave the country.

*6. What was the Jewish position in Africa under the Almohads?*

The Jew, as well as the Christian, had to choose between conversion to Islam and emigration. Synagogues and churches were either destroyed or changed into mosques. Large numbers of Jews left their homes for Spain, Italy or other countries, while others agreed to pronounce the formula of the Moslem faith: "There is no God but Allah and Mohammed is his prophet." They naturally had no objection to the first part of the declaration, and they thought that no harm was done to add the reference to Mohammed. Some of the rabbis, however, contended that even this reference could endanger the Jews by losing their hold on their ancient tradition. But the great Maimonides and his father,

who at that time had settled in Fez, North Africa, encouraged their brethren to continue to practice Judaism in secret.

*7. What was the Jewish position in Spain under the Almohads?*

In 1148 the Almohads invaded Spain, and the condition of the Jews changed for the worse. Here, too, the Almohads continued the policy which they had adopted in Africa. Synagogues and schools were destroyed, and the Jews were compelled either to embrace Islam or leave the country. The pretended converts were afterwards compelled to wear a special dress, consisting of a black or yellow tunic, with long sleeves, and a yellow scarf on their heads. Thus, the freedom which the Jews of Spain had enjoyed under the Moslems for more than four hundred years was at an end.

*8. How long did the Almohads' rule last?*

Within a hundred years, before the middle of the thirteenth century (1212), the power of the Almohads was broken in Spain. The Christian monarchs recaptured most of the Moslem possessions, until at last only Granada was left. It seems as if the tolerant Caliphs only could retain their power. The Almohads, however, continued in power in North Africa, and the lot of the Jews was a hard one for centuries afterwards.

## XIV

### JEWS IN TOLERANT CHRISTIAN SPAIN

(11th, 12th and 13th Centuries)

*1. Did the invasion of Spain by the Moslems bring the entire Peninsula under their rule?*

When the Moslems in 711 drove the Visigoths out of southern Spain, the result was the formation of a number of Christian kingdoms in other portions of the peninsula. These states from time to time combined among themselves. Ultimately there were only two Christian kingdoms in Spain, Aragon and Castile, which, in turn, were again united in the fifteenth century by the marriage of Ferdinand and Isabella, their respective monarchs. Aragon covered territory in the north and east of Spain, and Castile the remainder of the country. Castile (so called because of its numerous castles) was divided into two parts—Old Castile, comprising the original kingdom, which remained under Christian rule after the Moslem invasion in 711, and New Castile or Toledo, the provinces in the center and south of Spain, which were recaptured from the Moslems. Granada was the last portion of Andalusia which the Moslems retained.

*2. What was the Jewish position in Christian states after the invasion?*

After the Moslem conquest in 711, the first Christian monarchs of Spain treated the Jews mercilessly. They destroyed synagogues and put scholars to death. Gradually, they realized, however, that, surrounded as they were by powerful foes, the Moslems, they could not afford to have the Jews enemies as well. At the end of the tenth century, the Jews were placed on a complete equality with Christians. Although there were occasional outbreaks of persecution, for nearly 300 years the Jews of Christian Spain had little cause for complaint as to their treatment at the hands of the Christian rulers. Jewish scholars and statesmen contributed to the "golden age" of Jewish life in Spain under Christian rulers as they had done under the Moslems.

#### KING ALFONSO VI (Ruled 1065-1109)

*3. Describe the Jewish position under Alfonso VI.*

Under the rule of King Alfonso VI of Leon and Castile (ruled from 1065 to 1109), the Jews had full equality and even enjoyed the rights of the nobility. Alfonso was a clever, tolerant ruler, and employed many Jews at his court. His doctor and confidential adviser was a Jew named Cidello. To show their gratitude, the Jews willingly placed their services at the King's disposal.

*4. Tell of the position of Amram Ibn-Shalbib.*

Alfonso VI was anxious to conquer some of the Moslem dominions, which were split up into a number

of small states. This purpose, he thought, could only be accomplished by encouraging rivalry and quarrels among the various emirs, and playing off one against the other, thus weakening them all. He realized that the Jews, who understood Arabic, were likely to prove the most skilful diplomats to assist his plans. Accordingly, Amram ben Isaac Ibn-Shalbib—who was originally Alfonso's private physician, and was well versed in Arabic and possessed insight into the political circumstances of that time—was employed as ambassador to the various emirs. Thus, by means of an alliance with the Emir of Seville, Alfonso succeeded in 1085 in capturing the important town of Toledo, which afterwards became the capital of Castile, and the principal Jewish city in Spain.

*5. What tragic end resulted from Alfonso's plans?*

Not satisfied with the possession of Toledo, and having dropped the mask of friendship, Alfonso turned his attention to the city of Seville. He sent Amram Ibn-Shalbib, instructing him to reveal the true state of affairs to the Emir of Seville, and face him in a firm and defiant attitude. Amram Ibn-Shalbib, accompanied by 500 Christian knights, and acting in the spirit of his master, spoke in terms so positive that he called forth the fury of the Emir. Ibn-Shalbib was instantly put to death and his followers were imprisoned.

*6. What was the result of this breach of friendship?*

As a result of this unfriendly attitude on the part of King Alfonso VI, the Emir of Seville united with the other Moslem kingdoms, and sent for the Al-

moravid Caliph, Yusuf Ibn-Tashfin, to aid him against Alfonso. Alfonso suffered two heavy defeats in 1086 and 1108 at the hands of Yusuf and the united Moslems. The Almoravids thus extended their rule from Africa to Spain.

*7. Describe the Jewish co-operation in these two battles.*

To show their gratitude to King Alfonso for his tolerant attitude toward them, the Jews willingly placed their services at his disposal. At the battle of Zallaka in 1086, 40,000 Jews are said to have enrolled themselves under the king's banner, and they were distinguished from other soldiers by their black and yellow turbans. So large was the Jewish contingent that the generals on both sides agreed not to begin the battle until after the conclusion of the Sabbath. In 1108 at the battle of Ucles, Alfonso again experienced a disastrous defeat. The Jewish warriors are said to have comprised the whole left wing of the Christian army.

*8. What was the effect of this defeat upon the Jewish position?*

The Jews suffered as a result of this defeat. The Jewish soldiers were accused of being responsible for the outcome of the battle, and this caused a riot at Toledo. Synagogues were burned, and a large number of Jews were massacred. The king intended to punish the murderers, but he died in 1109 before he could carry out his intentions.

## KING ALFONSO VII (Ruled 1126–1157)

*9. Where did the Jews migrate as a result of the persecution by the Almohads?*

Most of the Jews, who had suffered at the hands of the Almohads in 1148 and subsequent years, travelled to the Christian provinces of Spain, especially to Toledo, the new capital of Castile. Here grew up a prosperous trade in silk and all kinds of cloth, and the manufacture of weapons and other articles, in which the Jews took a prominent part. The Jewish refugees were received with great kindness by King Alfonso VII, who reigned from 1126 to 1157.

*10. Who was the head of the Jewish community at this time and tell of his generous deeds?*

King Alfonso VII appointed as Nasi (prince) over the Jewish community a noble Jew named Judah ben Joseph Ibn-Ezra, a member of the famous Jewish family, which produced poets, philosophers and other great men in Spain. Moses Ibn-Ezra was his uncle, and Abraham Ibn-Ezra was another member of the family. Judah Ibn-Ezra was Court Chamberlain and commander of an important Moorish fortress. At his request the king provided land, houses and employment for the persecuted Jews from other parts, and Judah devoted part of his own wealth in furnishing them with food and clothing. Under Judah Ibn-Ezra's guidance, the Jewish community of Toledo flourished, and it gradually became the largest in Europe.

11. *Did the persecution of the Almohads affect the "Golden Age" of Jewish life in Spain?*

In spite of the persecution of the Almohads and occasional attacks, such as that which occurred in 1108, the "golden age" of Jewish learning was not interrupted; its center was merely transferred from one part of Spain to another. The Jews of Spain were not permanently affected by the various disturbances with which the country was continually affected. When war broke out between the various Christian kingdoms, the Jews fought on both sides, and they were usually placed in charge of the various fortresses. They thus took their part as citizens of the different states in which they settled. But they also developed a strong communal life of their own. Spain was their home in every sense of the word, and here they continued to enjoy prosperity and freedom, and to produce the most brilliant literature and scholarship.

#### KING ALFONSO VIII (Ruled 1170-1214)

12. *Describe the Jewish position under the rule of Alfonso VIII and tell of two distinguished Jewish personages.*

Under the reign of King Alfonso VIII, called the Noble, who ruled from 1170 to 1214, the Jews advanced still further in prosperity. Many talented Jews obtained high positions, were appointed officers of the state, and worked for the greatness of their beloved fatherland. One of these, Joseph ben Solomon Ibn-Shoshan, called "the Prince," had a distinguished position at the court. He was learned, pious, wealthy and



charitable. With great liberality he encouraged the study of the Talmud, and erected a new synagogue at Toledo. Another highly honored Jew at Alfonso's court was Abraham Alfakar, "crowned with noble qualities and magnanimous deeds. He was exalted in word and deed, an ornament to the king and the pride of princes." He wrote many Arabic poems, and was employed by Alfonso as ambassador.

*13. In what branch of literature did the Jews of Toledo distinguish themselves?*

Although the two patrons of Toledo at this time, Ibn-Shoshan and Abraham Alfakar, were themselves learned in the Talmud, and encouraged Talmudical learning, this study did not flourish in the Castilian capital. Toledo produced no Talmudists of renown. The congregation was compelled for several centuries to obtain its rabbis elsewhere. The Jews of Toledo had a greater inclination for science and poetry. They preferred philosophy, meditated deeply upon religion, and defended their belief against doubt. They were the most enlightened of the Spanish Jews.

*14. What was the cause of the massacre at Toledo?*

Although the Jews of Toledo assisted Alfonso VIII very considerably in his wars against the Moors (Moslem Berbers) both by serving in his armies and by providing money, yet they were accused of being responsible for a severe defeat which the king suffered at Alacros in 1195 and a number of the Jews were made the scapegoats and killed.

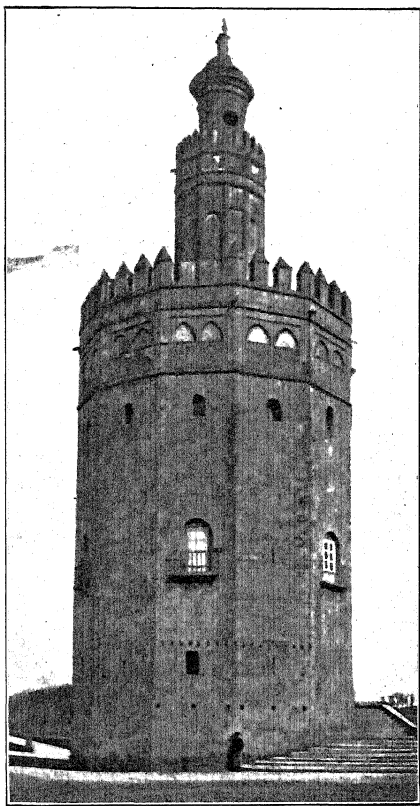
15. *What was the battle of Las Navas de Tolosa?*

The Moslems by this time overran Castile. The Jews bravely assisted in the defence of Toledo, which the Almohads attacked in 1198. With the assistance of the King of Aragon and other Christian monarchs, Alfonso in turn defeated the Moslems at the great battle of Las Navas de Tolosa in 1212, when 100,000 Moors are said to have been slain. This proved to be the turning point of Moslem rule in Spain, for, within a few years, the whole of the possessions of the Almohads, with the exception of Granada, came once more under Christian rule.

KING FERDINAND III (Ruled 1217–1252)

16. *Describe the Jewish position under the rule of Ferdinand III.*

During the whole of the thirteenth century, the Jews were fortunate in living under tolerant rulers. In 1236 King Ferdinand III of Castile captured Cordova, the capital of Andalusia, where he gave the Jews full liberty and permitted them to build a magnificent synagogue. In 1247 Ferdinand also captured Seville. The Jews heartily welcomed him, for they had lived a wretched existence under the Almohads, disguised as Moslems. Carrying scrolls of the law, they met the king as he entered the city, and presented him with the key of the Juderia (Jewish quarter) handsomely embossed in silver with the inscription "The King of Kings will open; the King of the land shall enter," worked on it. Ferdinand at once showed his good-will to the Jews of Seville by granting them land and allotting to them a large area of the city for their



*The Golden Tower of Seville*



quarter. Four mosques were turned into synagogues, and, from this time, the Jewish community of Seville became one of the most important in Spain.

*17. Tell of Ferdinand's patronage of learning and name two distinguished Jews at his Court.*

Ferdinand was a patron of learning, and during his reign, the Jewish College of Toledo was generally recognized as replacing that of Cordova in importance. Meir de Malea, a learned Talmudist, who was highly esteemed by the king for his honesty and zeal in public service, and by the Jews for his learning and nobility of character, was the chief collector of taxes. Another Jew, Judah Alfakar, was Ferdinand's doctor. He was a man of keen intellect and great scientific knowledge, and was the most learned and influential man in Toledo.

#### KING ALFONSO X (Ruled 1252-1284)

*18. What was the attitude of Ferdinand's successor toward the Jews?*

Ferdinand's death in 1252 was mourned by the Jews, and his tombstone bore a Hebrew epitaph. His son and successor, Alfonso X, (reigned 1252-1284) continued his father's friendly attitude toward the Jews, and employed many Jews at his court. Meir de Malea was his treasurer; Meir's two sons, Zag (*i. e.* Isaac) and Joseph, also assisted in the royal finances; Judah ben Moses Cohen and other Jews were the king's doctors. There were also Jewish tax collectors and other officials. During his reign, the Jewish Col-

lege of Toledo is said to have grown so large that it numbered 12,000 students.

*19. State clearly the Jewish contribution to learning and science under Alfonso's rule.*

Alfonso X—who was justly called “The Learned” (*El Sabio*), and whose deep knowledge and patronage of scholarship no Spanish monarch has ever surpassed—was anxious to spread learning among the people. As few Christian scholars at this time understood Arabic, the task of introducing Arabic literature to Christian Spain fell very largely to the Jews. Alfonso, therefore, employed Jews to translate learned Hebrew and Arabic works into Spanish. The Bible was also translated into Spanish, and other important historical works were published. The Jews took a prominent part in all this.

The science of astronomy, in which Alfonso was particularly interested, was much studied by the Jews in Spain. The king built an observatory for Jewish astronomers at Seville. Don Zag Ibn-Sid, who succeeded his father, Meir, as Alfonso's treasurer, and is said to have been chazan at the Toledo synagogue, was a distinguished astronomer. He compiled the astronomical tables which have become famous as the Alfonsine Tables, though they should have been named after Zag rather than after the king. These tables, which cost 400,000 ducats, set out the exact hours of the rising of the planets and fixed stars, and were of great importance to geographical discovery and the science of astronomy. A revision of these tables, made by a Jew, Abraham Zacuto, assisted Christopher Columbus on his voyages to America. Zag also invented various astronomical instruments. Judah

Cohen, Alfonso's doctor, was likewise an astronomer, and translated many Arabic works on this science into Spanish. Another scientist at Alfonso's court, Samuel ha-Levi, invented an ingenious water clock. Thus, the Jews of this time by no means confined themselves to Jewish studies, but took a prominent part as well in the promotion of general science.

*20. What was Alfonso's Code, and what was the cause for Jewish restrictions?*

The Church was strongly opposed to the favors granted to the Jews, and the Pope wrote to Alfonso setting out their numerous "sins" and protesting against the preference given to Jews over Christians. As a result of the influence of the Church, Alfonso included in his famous code of laws a number of restrictions against the Jews, largely based upon the Visigothic code, which had been translated into Castilian. The following were the restrictions: (1) Any attempt to convert Christians to Judaism was punishable by death and confiscation of property. (2) Jews were forbidden to employ or mix in any way with Christians, and (3) they were required to wear a special badge. (4) Jewish doctors were permitted to attend Christians, but the medicine they prescribed had to be dispensed by Christians. (5) Jews must not appear in the public streets on Good Friday. (6) Alfonso gave credence to the false story that the Jews every year, on Good Friday, crucified a Christian child, and therefore framed a law that whoever was found guilty of this crime, or whoever crucified a wax figure on that day, should be put to death. On the other hand, (1) Jews were not to be converted to Christianity by

force. (2) The Jewish Sabbath and festivals were respected, and no Jew was liable to be brought before the courts on those days. (3) Any desecration of synagogues was strictly forbidden, although permission had to be obtained for the building of new synagogues.

*21. What was the effect of Alfonso's Code upon the Jewish position?*

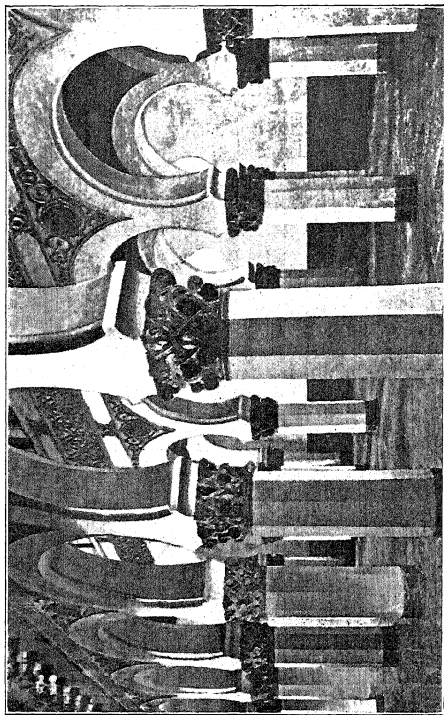
Alfonso's code is important historically as an indication of the evil days that were to come rather than of any immediate harsh effect. The general effect of these laws was to keep the Jews as a distinct community. No interference, however, was made with their religious liberties; in fact, they were expressly safeguarded. King Alfonso continued to employ Jews in high official positions, and he authorized the erection of the magnificent synagogue at Toledo, which was afterwards converted into a church with the name of Santa Maria la Blanca, and is still preserved as a national monument. The construction of this synagogue is a triumph of architecture. The ceiling was made of beams of cedar-wood from Lebanon, and the foundation was filled with earth brought from Jerusalem. The Jews of Castile numbered at this time fully half a million, and those of Toledo and neighboring districts 72,000.

*22. What was the Jewish position in Portugal?*

In Navarre and Portugal at this time the Jews also enjoyed liberty, and no distinction was made between Jews and Christians. The King of Portugal had a wealthy Jewish treasurer named Judah, who was also Chief Rabbi.







*Interior View of the Church of St. Maria La Blanca, Formerly a Synagogue in Toledo*

*23. What was the Jewish position in Aragon?*

In Aragon, too, during the greater part of this period (11th, 12th and 13th centuries), the Jews lived in peace, and there were flourishing Jewish communities in many cities. During the First Crusade in 1096, King Peter protected the Jews from attack, and his successors followed his example. Among the distinguished Jews in Aragon in the twelfth century was Abraham bar Chiya of Barcelona, the great scientist, translator and philosopher.

KING ALFONSO II (Ruled 1164–1196)

*24. What was the Jewish position under the rule of Alfonso II?*

King Alfonso II was a patron of learning, and had many Jewish officials. Sheshet ben Isaac Benveniste, whom Alfonso employed as ambassador, was a philosopher, doctor, diplomat, poet, Talmudic scholar and Nasi (prince) of the Jewish community of Barcelona. He was the author of an important medical work; he had a knowledge of Arabic, wrote several Jewish hymns, and generously supported Jewish students and poets. His reputation as Nasi of Barcelona was so great that Jews came from great distances to study under him.

KING JAMES I (1213–1276)

*25. What was the Jewish position under King James?*

Under King James I of Aragon (called "The Conqueror"), the Jewish position was not very for-

tunate. He treated the Jews and their property as his private chattels. They were allotted special quarters in various towns. They were not permitted to employ or live with Christians, and they were compelled to wear a yellow badge. King James I favored the conversion of the Jews, and a famous discussion took place at Barcelona between the great rabbi, Nachmanides, and a baptized Jew. On the whole, however, even at this time the Jews of Aragon were not unhappy. They owned property, were successful in farming and trade, and the kings continued to employ Jewish treasurers, doctors, tax-collectors, secretaries and other officials. Among them was Judah de la Caballeria, tax-collector of Barcelona and Chief Rabbi of Portugal, who was so wealthy that he could advance large sums of money for the purchase of a city.

*26. Why were the Jews tolerated even by intolerant Kings?*

The monarchs of Spain and Portugal were in the habit of entrusting their finances to the care of Jews, and, even in later times, when the Jews were persecuted, we find a succession of Jewish treasurers and tax-collectors. The Jews thus contributed substantially to the revenues in a double capacity. They paid heavy taxes themselves, and they also collected the taxes from the whole nation. Their keen judgment, ability, and, above all, their honesty made them almost indispensable to the kings, and their commercial aptitude was also used to great advantage in organizing supplies for various wars. Thus, their great usefulness in these directions influenced favorably the attitude of some intolerant monarchs toward the Jews.

## XV

### SOLOMON IBN-GABIROL

1021-1070

*1. Tell of the early life of Solomon Ibn-Gabirol.*

Solomon Ibn-Gabirol (Gabirol is pronounced Jabirol) was born in 1021 at Malaga, where his father had taken refuge, together with Samuel Ibn-Nagdela, at the time of the disturbances in Cordova in 1013. He was an only child; he had no brothers or sisters. His parents died when he was a child, and left him without means. The early loss of his parents gave a serious bent to his disposition. Sad and lonely, he wandered about, a prey to melancholy. Poetry was at first his only joy, for at an age when modern boys are at school, he was already a finished poet. Verse came to him naturally—he scarcely had to seek a word or thought.

*2. Did Solomon find a generous friend?*

At Saragossa, Solomon found a generous and kind patron in Jekuthiel Ibn-Hassan, who held a high position at the Caliph's court, and by whom the young poet was supported. Solomon now became cheerful.

But Jekuthiel died when Solomon was only seventeen, and the poet was stricken with grief, and wrote a composition of two hundred verses in praise of his patron. He again became melancholy, and thus he sang:

Surely a limit boundeth every woe,  
But mine enduring anguish hath no end;  
My grievous years are spent in ceaseless flow,  
My wound hath no amend.

*(Translated by Nina Davis)*

*3. What was the attitude of the Jews of Saragossa toward Solomon?*

Solomon Ibn-Gabirol's sensitive character made him many enemies at Saragossa. In an introduction to his Hebrew grammar, which he wrote at the age of nineteen, Solomon blames the Saragossa Jews, whom he calls "the blind community," for their indifference to Hebrew. Solomon loved Hebrew. He says that Hebrew was the language favored by God, for in this tongue the angels daily praised their Creator, and in it the law revealed to Moses on Mount Sinai was written. In Hebrew, too, the prophets prophesied and the Psalmist sang. Then again, Solomon's writings contained scornful criticism of various influential people in the community of Saragossa. He described the haughty men who regarded themselves as superior to their brethren, who thought their own opinions were always right, and had words of love on their lips, although their hearts were filled with hate. In consequence of these attacks, Solomon was forced to leave Saragossa in 1045.

4. *Where did Solomon go from Saragossa?*

In despair, Solomon determined to leave Spain altogether. He did not, however, carry out his determination to emigrate but, sad and lonely, he wandered again about the country. Finally he found a home with Samuel Ibn-Nagdela at Granada, and the great Rabbi and Vizier proved a real friend to the unfortunate young poet.

5. *What were Solomon's philosophic achievements?*

Solomon Ibn-Gabirol, once more at peace, turned his attention to philosophy. But previous to this time, while still at Saragossa, Solomon in the year 1045 wrote a book in which he compared the sayings of the Bible and the Talmud with the teachings of Greek philosophers like Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, and also Arabic and Jewish philosophers. In this book he showed a surprisingly deep insight into philosophy.

At Granada, under the powerful protection of the Jewish Vizier, Solomon Ibn-Gabirol, though still a young man, endeavored to solve the deepest problems of existence, as, for instance, "What is the highest aim of life?" "Whence does the soul come, and where does it go?" "How may God be regarded, and how did He create the world?" These and similar questions Ibn-Gabirol discussed in his book *The Fountain of Life* written in Arabic in the form of a conversation between a master and a pupil. A century later, after its first appearance, it was translated into Latin, called *Fons Vitae* (The Fountain of Life). The translation into Latin, which was made by a Christian and a baptized Jew, attracted the attention of Christian scholars, by whom Gabirol was called Avicbron. For many

centuries it was thought that the author Avicbron was a learned Moslem philosopher. It is only in recent years that a Jewish scholar, Solomon Munk (1803-1867) made the discovery, in 1859, that Gabirol, the poet, and Avicbron, the author of *The Fountain of Life*, were the same person.

6. *What is the content of Solomon's ethical work?*

Solomon Ibn-Gabirol also wrote an ethical work, called *The Improvement of Character*, in which he formulated the following thought: Man is the highest being in the world, because he is gifted with speech and reason. Therefore, man's first aim must be to use his reason to acquire knowledge, as far as his limited mind can reach. Man's next ideal should be the improvement of his character, which, with the gift of free-will, is within his power. These two powers, the intellectual and the moral, are united, for the more he throws off the sensual and unworthy desires, the higher are his spiritual attainments, and these, in turn, will bring him new joy, the immortal bliss of God-like nature.

7. *Why is Solomon Ibn-Gabirol called "The Jewish Plato"?*

Solomon Ibn-Gabirol was gifted with one of the most original minds among Jews or Arabs, and with a deep insight in philosophy. His philosophy has been compared to that of Philo: First, because both belonged to the Neo-Platonic school, which attempted to explain the relationship of God to the world, based upon the philosophy of Plato; second, both linked



Greek and Oriental philosophy; and, third, both exercised a great influence on Christian thought.

8. *Tell of Solomon's poetic achievements.*

Solomon Ibn-Gabirol is known to Jews for his poetry, not for his philosophy. Philosophy was his mother, but poetry was his beloved. He brought Hebrew poetry to its highest stage of development. The Hebrew language was moulded into new rhyme and rhythm in the hands of this young poet. Some of his poems are included in the service of the synagogue. The "Song of Redemption" is recited as a Sabbath morning hymn between Passover and Pentecost, in which the poet bewails the bitter fate of his people Israel:

Captive of sorrow on a foreign shore,  
A handmaid as 'neath Egypt's slavery;  
Through the dark day of her bereavement sore  
She looketh unto Thee.  
Restore her sons, O mighty One of old!  
Her remnant tenth shall cause man's strife to cease.  
O speed the message; swiftly be she told  
Good tidings, which Elijah shall unfold:  
"Daughter of Zion, sing aloud! behold  
Thy Prince of Peace!"  
Wounded and crushed, beneath my load I sigh,  
Despised and abject, outcast, trampled low;  
How long, O Lord, shall I of violence cry,  
My heart dissolved with woe?  
How many years, without a gleam of light,  
Has thralldom been our lot, our portion pain. . . .  
(Translated by Nina Davis)

In his "Confession," which is included in the Day of Atonement service, Solomon humbles himself before his Creator:

Thou art all-wise, all-good, all-great, divine,  
Yea, Thou art God; eternity is Thine;  
While I, a thing of clay  
The creature of a day,  
Pass shadow-like, a breath, that comes and flees  
away.  
My God, I know my sins are numberless,  
More than I can recall to memory  
Or tell their tale: yet some will I confess,  
Even a few, though as a drop it be  
In all the sea.

*(Translated by Alice Lucas)*

The troubled soul, in the poet's view, can always find peace in communion with God and in the knowledge that the cares of this life will disappear in the world to come:

O Soul, with storms beset,  
Thy griefs and cares forget!  
Why dread earth's transient woe,  
When soon thy body in the grave unseen  
Shall be laid low,  
And all will be forgotten then, as though  
It had not been?

*(Translated by Alice Lucas)*

In his poem "What is Man?" the poet describes the insignificance of man's lifetime, and implores God's mercy and love for man:

Almighty! what is man?

A faded leaf!

If Thou dost weigh him in the balance—lo!

He disappears—a breath that Thou dost blow.

His heart is ever filled

With lust of lies unstilled.

Wilt bear in mind his crime

Unto all time?

He fades away like clouds sun-kissed,

Dissolves like mist.

Then spare him, let him love and mercy win,

According to Thy grace, and not according to his  
sin.

*(Translated by Emma Lazarus)*

The greatest poetical work of Solomon Ibn-Gabirol is *The Royal Crown* (Kether Malchuth), comprising a series of poems, in which he praises the greatness of God, and expresses his unfailing trust in Him:

Thou need'st no service at my humble hand,  
Yet gav'st me life and blessed my happy birth;  
Thy spirit bade my budding soul expand  
To blossom on Thy fair and wondrous earth.

And Thou hast reared me with a father's care,  
Strengthen'd my limbs and nursed the tender child;  
Lull'd on my mother's gentle bosom, where  
Thine all-protecting wing and blessing smiled.

And when I grew and all erect could stand,  
Thou did'st enfold me in Thy fostering arms,  
Guiding my tott'ring steps with Thy right hand  
To manly strength, which scorneth all alarms.

The ways of wisdom did'st Thou then command,  
To shield my heart 'gainst sorrow and distress,  
Conceal'd within the shadow of Thy hand,  
When fear and wrath did all the land oppress.

How many an unseen danger have I pass'd!  
Before the wound the balm is yet prepared;  
A remedy before the spear is cast,  
The foeman vanquished ere the war's declared.

When plenty reign'd, my share of wealth I won,  
But when I roused with provocation sore  
Thy wrath, as doth a father to his son,  
Thou did'st chastise, that I should sin no more.

I am unworthy of the saving love  
Thou hast to me, Thy servant, ever shown,  
So must I waft my song of praise above,  
And unto Thee my gratitude make known.

(Translated by Elsie Davis)

But not all of Ibn-Gabirol's poems were religious in character or melancholy in note. He wrote some tender nature verse and wine songs and other poems in lighter vein. The following is an example of a poem in which the poet complains of a feast at which there is no wine:

The Feast's begun  
And the wine is done,  
So my sad tears run  
Like streams of water, streams of water.

Around the board you see no smile;  
Untasted dishes rest in file,  
How can I touch these dainties while

There stands my cup  
To the brim filled up  
With hated Water, Water, Water!

Can I myself to aught compare?  
To the frog who damp in watery lair,  
With dismal croakings fills the air?

So frog and I  
Will sing or cry,  
The song of Water, the dirge of Water.

(Translated by Israel Abrahams)

Solomon Ibn-Gabirol is also the author of the work *Choicest of Pearls*, which comprises sixty-four chapters of maxims, proverbs and moral sayings, many of them in the form of riddles. The following are a few examples of his sayings:

Questioning is half-way to wisdom.

Courtesy is half-way to cleverness.

Thrift is half-way to wealth.

What is the test of good manners? Being able to bear patiently with bad ones.

He who withholds charity from his relatives and gives money to the stranger is like a mother who looks after her neighbor's child, but lets her own child die of hunger and want.

The wise man who helps others by his wisdom and cannot help himself is like a well that satisfies the thirst, but is full of dirt at the bottom.

He who is satisfied with little is rich as a king, but the greatest king who is not contented with his kingdom is like a beggar.

The space of a needle's eye suffices for two friends, but the world itself can scarcely contain two enemies.

Words may occasion regret, but silence will avoid it.

A friendless man is like a left hand without a right hand.

*9. Tell of the last years of Solomon Ibn-Gabriel's life.*

The last years of Solomon's life were again gloomy. His patron, Samuel Ibn-Nagdela, had died, and Samuel's son, Joseph, had been killed in Granada in 1066. Solomon was once more restless and wandered about, bewailing his bitter life and the life of his people, Israel. After many years of wandering, Solomon finally settled in Valencia, where he died in 1070. A legend relates that he was murdered by a Moslem poet, who was jealous of his poetic gifts, and buried his body under a fig tree. The tree bore abundant and exceedingly sweet fruit. This called attention, a search was made, Ibn-Gabriel's body was discovered, and his murderer was put to death.

## XVI

### MOSES IBN-EZRA

1070-1139

*1. Tell of the early life of Moses Ibn-Ezra.*

In the very year of Solomon Ibn-Gabirol's death in 1070, another Jewish poet, Moses Ibn-Ezra, of a distinguished Jewish family, was born at Granada. His father had a position at the Emir's court, under Samuel Ibn-Nagdela. Early in his life, Moses fell in love with his niece, by whom he was loved in return. His brother, however, would not consent to the marriage, and Moses, grievously disappointed, became unfriendly to his brother and left his father's house. He wandered to Portugal and Castile, and tried to quench his grief.

*2. Where did young Moses turn for comfort?*

Deprived of human love, Moses Ibn-Ezra, like Solomon Ibn-Gabirol, turned to poetry—his new beloved. He endeavored to drown his sorrow in study and to find in poetry both brotherly affection and his beloved; and, indeed, Moses did find comfort in poetry. The world, he said, had never seen the like of his love or his loved one. Though she frown on him and smile on others, his life would be a slavery if he were re-

leased from her bonds. To the object of his affection, he cried:

“Live on! though thy lips drop honey for others to sip;  
Live on! breathing myrrh for others to inhale.  
Though thou art false to me,  
Till the cold earth claims her own again,  
I shall remain true to thee.”

3. *Tell of Moses Ibn-Ezra's poetic achievements.*

Moses Ibn-Ezra was a master of the Hebrew language, and composed a large number of poems, many of which are distinguished for their beauty of form and style. He wrote 300 poems, comprising 10,000 verses for special occasions, and many of his 200 hymns are found in the Jewish prayer book, principally for the New Year and Day of Atonement services. They chiefly take the form of “Selichoth” (prayers for forgiveness) and invite the worshipper to look within himself, to realize the vanity of life, and to recognize the disillusion which awaits the man that seeks pleasure only. He also wrote a large number of poems in praise of friends and in memory of departed scholars; also several riddles and epigrams in verse. Moses Ibn-Ezra was a great lover of Nature, and he sang of the beauty of country life, the songs of birds, also of wine and love, the glory of poetry, and all the delights of life.

4. *What is Moses Ibn-Ezra's chief poem?*

Moses Ibn-Ezra's largest poem is called *Tarshish*, the Hebrew numerical value of which is 1,210, and it is, therefore, so-called because it comprises



1,210 lines in a composition of ten chapters. The different verses in each chapter start with one of the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet. Moses Ibn-Ezra was especially fond of using the same word with different meaning at the end of different lines, a habit which he adopted from Arabic poets. This poem, the *Tarshish*, Moses dedicated to his patron, Abraham Ibn-Kamnial, doctor and Vizier to the Almoravid Caliph, Ali.

5. *What other works, except poetry, did Moses write?*

Moses Ibn-Ezra wrote a work called *Conversations and Recollections*, written in Arabic, in which he gave a history of Jewish, Arabic and Castilian poetry. He also wrote a treatise explaining the philosophy of the time.

6. *Did Moses ever become reconciled with his family?*

Moses Ibn-Ezra became reconciled with his brother when the beloved of his youth died in giving birth to a son. She spoke of him on her death-bed, and her words moved him to compose a tender poem, which he sent to his eldest brother, and was the first step in the renewal of friendship with his family.

7. *In what esteem was Moses held by his contemporaries?*

Notwithstanding his comparative insignificance as a philosopher and his mediocrity as a poet, Moses Ibn-Ezra was held in great honor by the distinguished men of his time. He stood on friendly terms with all important personages, and they praised him in prose and verse. He retained the gift of poetry in his old age.

His friend Judah ha-Levi, the greatest Hebrew poet since the Psalmist, dedicated many poems to him, and wrote a touching tribute to his memory when he died in 1139. Judah ben Solomon Al-Charizi, a celebrated Hebrew poet of the early part of the thirteenth century, called Moses Ibn-Ezra "the poet's poet—he knows his art and how to show it; he draws pearls from the well of thought."

## XVII

### ABRAHAM IBN-EZRA

1092-1167

*1. Tell of the early life of Abraham Ibn-Ezra.*

Abraham ben Meir Ibn-Ezra, a relative of Moses Ibn-Ezra, was born about the year 1092 at Toledo. He was the friend of Moses Ibn-Ezra and Judah ha-Levi, and commenced writing poetry when he was a young man. He called himself "the father of poems," and later in his life he wrote: "Once in my youth I used to compose songs with which I decorated the Hebrew scholars as with a necklace." Abraham Ibn-Ezra, however, had little luck in worldly affairs. Fate, it seems, was always against him. He had an unhappy married life, and his son, Isaac, abandoned Judaism. He was unable to earn his livelihood. Thus, he sang:

My labor's vain,  
No wealth I gain.  
My fate since birth  
Is gloom on earth.  
If I sold shrouds,  
No one would die.

If I sold lamps,  
Then in the sky,  
The sun for spite,  
Would shine by night.

*2. State the characteristic qualities of Abraham Ibn-Ezra.*

Abraham Ibn-Ezra was one of the greatest Jews of the Middle Ages. He was at once poet and philosopher, mathematician and astronomer, grammarian and Bible critic, traveller and wit—his range of knowledge and activity were alike extraordinary. Few men in Jewish history have excelled in so many branches of learning, though there are many examples of scholars who combined a knowledge of science with the study of Bible and Talmud, and a few instances of men who were both poets and philosophers. Abraham Ibn-Ezra, however, united all these qualities in his own personality.

*3. Tell of the observations Abraham made on his journeys.*

Unable to earn a living at home, Abraham Ibn-Ezra started on his travels. He seems to have had a roving disposition. Accompanied at first by his son, Isaac, who was also a poet, he wandered to various countries—Africa, Egypt, Palestine and Arabia. During the course of his extensive journey, Ibn-Ezra made many careful observations and enriched the vast stores of his mind. In his various books he gives much interesting information about the places he visited. He describes the Nile and the Red Sea, the bonnets of

the ladies, some old manuscript of the Bible which he happened to see in the course of his travels, discusses the difference in time between one place and another, and records the customs, character and food of the people in various countries.

*4. Tell of Ibn-Ezra's activities in Italy.*

Wandering to various countries, Abraham Ibn-Ezra finally settled in Rome in the year 1140. His appearance in Italy marks an epoch in the development of culture among the Italian Jews. When he arrived at Rome, he found Jewish study in a neglected condition. He, therefore, introduced to his Italian brethren the wider Jewish culture, which he so brilliantly represented. In Rome he translated the works of the famous Jewish grammarian, Judah Chayuj, from Arabic into Hebrew, and also wrote some original works, in which he summarized the work of other grammarians, and discussed Hebrew style and other aspects of the subject.

*5. Tell of Abraham's activity at Lucca.*

At Lucca, Italy, where he lived several years, and gathered a circle of followers around him, Abraham Ibn-Ezra wrote books on the Jewish calendar, mathematics and astronomy, and drew up astronomical tables, which were afterwards used by Christopher Columbus on his voyages to America. His arithmetical work, *The Book of Numbers*, contains the following unusual order of subjects: Multiplication, division, addition, subtraction, fractions, proportion and square root.

*6. What is Ibn-Ezra's most important work?*

Abraham Ibn-Ezra's most important work is his Bible commentary. He was the pioneer of scientific Biblical criticism, in which work he was for a long time without a rival. Aided by his deep knowledge of grammar and other subjects and an excellent flowing style, he was able to make the Book of Books more intelligible to the people. Although he examined the text of the Bible with a critical eye, Abraham never wavered for a moment in the belief that the whole of it was divinely inspired. In the introduction to each commentary he explains his method and makes remarks about the character and contents of each book.

*7. How was Abraham's commentary accepted by the Jews of his time?*

His commentary on the Pentateuch (Five Books of Moses or the Torah) and on Isaiah, the Psalms and other books of the Bible made Ibn-Ezra renowned throughout Europe. Abraham Ibn-Ezra wrote some of his commentaries in the south of France, where he had gone from Italy. Here Jacob Tam, Rashi's grandson and the greatest rabbi of the time, paid him homage. Numerous copies were made of Ibn-Ezra's Biblical commentaries, which were eagerly studied, and many scholars wrote super-commentaries on them. The commentaries were used not merely as a help to the understanding of the Bible, but as a text-book on Judaism and philosophy, for Abraham Ibn-Ezra used his commentaries as a medium to express his philosophic views.

8. *Tell of Abraham's activities in London.*

Abraham Ibn-Ezra's love of travel led him in the year 1158, at the age of sixty-six, to London, where Jews were still permitted to reside, although they were expelled from England a century later. In London he wrote a book on the origin of religion, called *Yesod Mora* (The Foundation of Religion), compiled for a London patron named Joseph ben Jacob. In this book Abraham states that there is a law which stands behind all the divine commands, namely, "Ye shall serve the Lord your God" (Exod. xxiii.25). This includes all the laws to be kept by heart, word or deed.

Abraham also wrote a defense of the Sabbath, called *The Sabbath Letter*. He introduced the subject by describing a dream in which an angel delivered to him a letter from the Sabbath. In this letter the Sabbath complains that a pupil had explained that the Biblical day began with the morning and that the Sabbath, therefore, did not commence on Friday evening. Abraham was commanded to defend the Sabbath. This he did with great vigor. He justified the traditional view by quotations from the Bible and astronomical explanations. The Sabbath did not enter "like a thief in the night, but was welcomed as a day of joy with beautiful ceremonies in the Jewish home."

9. *Tell of Ibn-Ezra's activities in France.*

After a short stay in London, Abraham returned to France, where he revised his commentary and composed his last work, a book on grammar, called *Safah Berurah* (Clear Language).

*10. Tell of Abraham's achievements in poetry.*

Abraham Ibn-Ezra's achievements in poetry lie chiefly in the fact that many of his poems sparkle with witty epigrams, riddles and satires. He could make fun of the most serious things, and not least of his own lonely life. When his friend, Judah ha-Levi, died, Abraham wrote a poem containing an imaginary invitation from Judah, summoning him to join the famous poet in Heaven. He also wrote a poem giving his supposed reply, declining the invitation. "For Heaven's manna I am not yet prepared," he said.

When Abraham visited Cairo, Egypt, in the course of his travels, he called on the famous Maimonides, but was unable to meet the busy doctor and rabbi. He expressed his bad luck, which seemed to follow him everywhere, in the following amusing lines:

I call on my lord in the morning,  
But am told that on horseback he's sped;  
I call once again in the evening,  
And hear that his lordship's abed.  
But, whether his highness is riding,  
Or whether my lord is asleep,  
I am perfectly sure disappointment  
Is the one single fruit I shall reap.

*(Translated by J. Chotzner)*

Arithmetical riddles were always a favorite pastime of the Jewish people, and they were assisted in devising ingenious puzzles of this kind by the fact that the Hebrew letters have a numerical value as well as a sound. Abraham wrote numerous arithmetical puzzles. The following is an example: "Take 30 from 30 and



the remainder is 60," thus from שְׁלִשִּׁים take the letter ה whose numerical value is 30 and the remainder is שְׁשִׁים (Hebrew for 60).

Chess was a favorite game with the Jews of the Middle Ages, and many distinguished rabbis were players, though they were opposed to playing for money. Many poems were written in honor of the game, and one of them was composed by Abraham Ibn-Ezra. It contains the oldest set of chess rules in existence:

I will sing a song of battle,  
Planned in days long passed and over.  
Men of skill and science set it  
On a plain of eight divisions,  
And designed in squares all chequered.  
Two camps face each one the other,  
And the kings stand by for battle,  
And 'twixt these two is the fighting.  
Bent on war the face of each is,  
Ever moving or encamping,  
Yet no swords are drawn in warfare,  
For a war of thoughts their war is.

Should a king in the destruction  
Fall within the foeman's power,  
He is never granted mercy,  
Neither refuge nor deliv'rance,  
Nor a flight to refuge-city.  
Judged by foes, and lacking rescue,  
Though not slain he is checkmated.  
Hosts about him all are slaughtered,  
Giving life for his deliverance.  
Quenched and vanished is their glory,

For they see their lord is smitten;  
Yet they fight again this battle,  
For in death is resurrection.

*(Translated by Nina Davis)*

Abraham Ibn-Ezra also wrote tender love-poems, of which the following is an example:

Thy breath is far sweeter than honey,  
Thy radiance brightens the day;  
Thy voice is e'en softer than lyre-note,  
Yet hear I its echoes alway.  
Thy wit is as pure as thy witchery,  
And both in thy face are displayed;  
Alas! 'mid the haze of thy pleasure,  
From the path to thy heart I have strayed.

The poet also wrote light-hearted hymns for the home, of which the following is an example of a table-song for Chanukah:

Eat dainty foods and fine,  
And bread baked well and white,  
With pigeons, and red wine,  
On this Sabbath Chanukah night.

Our fields and our lands  
We will pledge, we will sell,  
To put money in our hands  
To feast Chanukah well.

Although Abraham Ibn-Ezra was full of humor, and was also interested in the mysteries of the stars, the so-called science of astrology, in which, strange to say, he believed, he yearned always for a closer communion

with God, and gave expression in his hymns to his implicit reliance on the Almighty:

I hope for the salvation of the Lord,  
In Him I trust, when fears my being thrill,  
Come life, come death, according to His word,  
He is my portion still.

Sweet is ev'n sorrow coming in His name,  
Nor will I seek its purpose to explore;  
His praise will I continually proclaim,  
And bless Him evermore.

*11. What was Ibn-Ezra's advice to man?*

Abraham Ibn-Ezra urged his readers to avoid extremes—over-indulgence on the one hand, and excessive piety on the other. He himself adopted the “golden mean.” He declared that the true happiness of a pious man was not increased by useless wealth. His own riches lay in a full life, ripe knowledge, humorous outlook, keen insight, clear vision, love for his people and Jewish literature, the desire to improve himself and others, and complete confidence in God. All the gold and precious jewels of the world cannot purchase such priceless possessions.

*12. Give some examples of Ibn-Ezra's wise sayings.*

All men have desires, but he who frees himself from desires assuredly is a king, and deserves to be crowned with a royal diadem.

If to God's law ye will be true, ye shall be free, as kings are free. But he who covets pride and glittering honors is humbled as a slave of slaves.

The dietary laws help us to control the appetite and to protect the soul from defilement.

There is nothing absolutely bad—such evil as exists is due to man's perverse choice.

Over-indulgence in wine corrupts the mind and the service of God.

No man can acquire wisdom or arrive at a knowledge of God who does not know himself.

We eat in order that we may live; we should not live for the sake of eating.

Women pay too much attention to outward appearances.

Respect is due to every man according to his station in life—even an unjust king should be honored because of his position.

### *13. Where and when did Abraham die?*

In his closing years Ibn-Ezra longed to return to his native land, and accordingly began his homeward journey. When he reached the town of Calahorra, Spain, he died at the age of 75 years in 1167. On his death-bed he wittily applied to himself the Biblical verse (Gen. xii.4): "And Abraham was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran" (*i. e.* trouble).

## XVIII

### JUDAH HA-LEVI

1085–1145 .

*1. Tell of the early life of Judah ha-Levi.*

Judah ben Samuel ha-Levi was born at Toledo about 1085, the year in which the city was captured from the Moslems by Alfonso VI of Castile. His father sent Judah, who was his only son, to Lucena, near Granada, where he received his Jewish education at the college of Isaac Alfasi, the great Talmudic scholar. He also acquired a knowledge of Greek and Arabic philosophy, astronomy, mathematics and medicine. Returning to Toledo, after the conclusion of his studies, Judah practised medicine as his profession.

*2. Tell of Judah's early poetic efforts.*

Very early in life Judah ha-Levi, the most brilliant name of the "golden age" of Spain, showed his love for poetry and his skill in writing verse, and he chose the language of the Bible—Hebrew—in which to express his thoughts. In his student days at Lucena, he became known as a poet. He sent some of his compositions to Moses Ibn-Ezra at Granada. Moses Ibn-Ezra, then the chief literary authority of Spanish

Jewry, graciously praised Judah's efforts, and expressed his astonishment that he showed such ability:

How can a boy so young in years  
Bear such a weight of wisdom sage,  
Nor 'mongst the greybeards find his peers  
While still in the very bloom of age?  
(Translated by Joseph Jacobs)

3. *Tell of Judah ha-Levi's popularity as a poet.*

Judah's friends realized that he possessed the divine gift of poetry. Accordingly, in joy and in sorrow they called upon him to express in verse their innermost feelings and thoughts. Lovers asked him to voice their bliss. At weddings and other festive gatherings Judah was requested to celebrate the occasion by appropriate poems. The death of a great scholar or the appointment of a rabbi would be similarly marked. On the death of his teacher, Isaac Alfasi, Judah composed a beautiful elegy, and the installation of Joseph Ibn-Migash, who succeeded Isaac Alfasi in the office of rabbi (1103), he celebrated in a poem expressing his homage and deep respect.

4. *Tell of Judah ha-Levi's poetic achievements.*

Judah ha-Levi had a joyous nature, and did not share the gloom and melancholy which are sometimes reflected in the poems of Solomon Ibn-Gabirol and Moses Ibn-Ezra. At social gatherings he was much in demand, and he would delight his friends by his witty poems, riddles and epigrams. The following are examples of his riddles:

Happy lovers learn our law,  
Be joined in one as we.  
Aught that passes through we saw,  
And again are one, you see.  
(A pair of scissors).

What is it that's blind with an eye in its head,  
And the race of mankind its use cannot spare;  
Spends all its life in clothing the dead,  
And always itself is naked and bare?

(A needle)  
(Translated by Joseph Jacobs)

The following is an example of his epigrams:

One day I observed a grey hair in my head;  
I plucked it right out, when it thus to me said:  
"Thou mayest smile, if thou wilt, at thy treatment  
of me,  
But a score of my friends will soon make mock of thee."  
(Translated by J. Chotzner)

Judah ha-Levi's love-songs display the fire of youth.  
He praised the beautiful eyes of his beloved, her rosy  
lips and raven hair, and complained of her unfaithful-  
ness and of the wounds that rent his heart:

Awake, dear one, from thy slumber arise,  
The sight of thee will ease my pain;  
If thou dream'st of one that is kissing thine eyes,  
Awake, and soon the dream I'll explain.  
(Translated by Joseph Jacobs)

In a poem on separation, Judah ha-Levi strikes a  
note of deeper passion:

And so we twain must part! Oh, linger yet,  
Let me still feed my glance upon thine eyes.  
Forget not, love, the days of our delight,  
And I our nights of bliss shall ever prize.  
In dreams thy shadowy image I shall see,  
Oh, even in my dreams be kind to me!

*(Translated by Emma Lazarus)*

When Judah was blamed for his sparkling lyrics and praise of love and wine, he replied :

Shall he, who four-and-twenty years has not seen run,  
Abandon all his joys, and the wine-cup shun?

Judah ha-Levi is often happy in his nature poems. He sings of the southern skies, the meadows and the blue streams of his native land. In his ode on Spring he describes the earth as a bride yearning for the summer-time of love, and as a girl blushing in her newly donned robes of golden flowers, embroidered with lilies :

Then, day by day her broidered gown  
She changes for fresh wonder ;  
A rich profusion of gay robes  
And scatters all around her.  
From day to day her flowers' tints  
Change quick, like eyes that brighten,  
Now white, like pearl, now ruby-red,  
Now emerald-green they'll lighten.  
She turns all pale ; from time to time  
Red blushes quick o'er cover ;  
She's like a fair, fond bride that pours  
Warm kisses to her lover.  
The beauty of her bursting spring  
So far exceeds my telling,



Methinks sometimes she pales the stars  
That have in heaven their dwelling.

*(Translated by Edward G. King)*

In richness of fancy, poetic expression and beautiful language, Judah ha-Levi was an artist of no mean standard. In one of his poems he describes a calm night at sea:

And when the sun retires to the mansions of the skies,  
Where all the hosts of heaven their general await,  
The night comes on, an Ethiop queen, her garment all  
of gold,  
Comes, here deck'd with azure and there with pearls  
ornate.

And the constellations wander through the center of  
the sea,

Like pilgrims doomed to linger far from all that's  
consecrate;

Their twinkling forms and figures their likeness reproduce

In ocean's mirror and images of flaming fire create.  
The visage of the ocean and of the heavens mingle here,  
And gather sharp and bright in a pattern complicate.  
And the ocean and the firmament commingle in their  
hue,

And form but two oceans that now communicate.

And in the very midst of them my heart another sea  
contains,

With the echoes of its passion—the billows of its fate.

*(Translated by Joseph Jacobs)*

5. *Tell of Judah ha-Levi's religious poetry.*

If one may speak of religious geniuses, Judah ha-Levi must certainly be regarded among the great-

est. No other man, it seems, drew so near to God as Judah; no one else knew how to cling to him so closely:

Absent from Thee, my very life is death,  
But could I cleave to Thee, then death were life.  
What share have I in time, except Thy will?  
If Thou be not my lot, what lot have I?  
Spoiled of all merit, robbed and naked left,  
Thy righteousness alone must cover me.  
Yet why should I tell out my prayer in words?  
O God, before Thee lies mine whole desire.

*(Translated by Edward G. King)*

The thought of God gave Judah ha-Levi no rest; by day and night his soul yearned for his Creator:

O that a dream might hold Him in its bond,  
I would not wake: nay sleep should ne'er depart.  
Would I might see His face within my heart,  
Mine eyes would never yearn to look beyond.

*(Translated by Nina Davis)*

With all my heart, in truth, and passion strong,  
I love Thee; both in solitude and throng  
Thy name's with me, alone I shall not bide:  
My friend art Thou, though others from me glide.  
My lamp art Thou too; my light shall never fade,  
Nor shall my foot e'er slip, by Thee upstayed.

*(Translated by Israel Cohen)*

Judah ha-Levi's poems have been included in the synagogue services of almost every Jewish congregation. More than three hundred of his poems are found in the prayer book. Judah's largest religious poem is a "Prayer of Sanctification" (Kedushah), which calls

upon the whole world to praise God with rejoicing. Some of his verses seem to breathe that yearning for God that we find in the Psalms: "As the heart panteth after the water-brook, so my soul yearneth for the living God." Judah by his verses has also beautified the religious life of the home. The following is one of his most beautiful Sabbath hymns:

On Friday doth my cup o'erflow,  
 What blissful rest the night shall know,  
 When, in Thine arms, my toil and woe  
 Are all forgot, Sabbath, my love!

The fifth day joyful tidings bring,  
 The morrow shall my freedom bring,  
 At dawn a slave, at eve a king.

Bring fruits and wine and sing a gladsome lay,  
 Cry, "Come in peace, O restful Seventh Day!"

*(Translated by Solomon S. Cohen)*

#### 6. *Why is Judah ha-Levi called the National Poet?*

Next to God, Israel stands nearest to the poet's heart. Their sufferings and hopes are his. He describes the people of Israel as "the dove in a strange land." "Why hast Thou sold us to the oppressors?" he cries. "Shall we be captives forever in strange lands? How long must our anxious hopes drag on? When shall the morn of freedom dawn for Israel?". Like the Psalmist, Judah ha-Levi gladly sinks his own individuality into the wider one of his people Israel. He prays for "refreshment for the weary flower"—Israel. He represents Israel calling on God with tender persuasion to set him free:

Come, Beloved, come Thou to me,  
In the bower of lilacs woo me;  
Slay the fiends that would pursue me.

Judah's poetic spirit, however, soon found joy in the thought that one day his dove Israel will fly away from its home in Edom and Arabia (Christendom and Islam) and will find a resting place in Zion. He never lost faith in the eventual deliverance of Israel and the eternal existence of his people:

Lo! sun and moon, these ministers for aye;  
The laws of day and night cease nevermore:  
Given for signs to Jacob's seed that they  
Shall ever be a nation—till these be o'er.  
If with His left hand He should thrust away,  
Lo! with His right hand He shall draw them nigh.  
(Translated by Nina Davis)

His faith in the redemption of his people led him to imagine, in his poetic vision, that God answered him and promised immediate freedom for Israel:

Bide thou thy time—within thy soul be peace,  
Nor ask complaining when thy pain shall cease;  
Speak, rime, and sing, for victory is thine,  
Nigh thee My tent is pitched, and thou art Mine.

7. *Why is Judah ha-Levi called "The Sweet Singer of Zion"?*

Judah ha-Levi's national feelings and hopes became centered round Jerusalem. Sunny Spain no longer possessed any charms for him. There was only one image in his heart—Zion:

O! city of the world, most chastely fair,  
In the far West, behold I sigh for thee.

Oh! had I eagle's wings, I'd fly to thee,  
And, with my falling tears, make moist the earth.  
(Translated by Lady Magnus)

This irresistible impulse toward Zion, the poet's favored city, gave birth to a series of deeply impassioned songs, which are as full of true feeling as they are beautiful in form:

In the East, in the East is my heart,  
And I dwell at the end of the West;  
How shall I join in your feasting,  
How shall I share in your jest;  
How shall my offering be paid,  
My vows with performance be crowned,  
While Zion pineth in Edom's bonds,  
And I am pent in the Arab's bound!  
All the beauties and treasures of Spain  
Are worthless as dust, in mine eyes;  
But the dust of the Lord's ruined house,  
As a treasure of beauty I prize.

(Translated by Solomon Solis Cohen)

8. What was the culmination of Judah ha-Levi's yearning for Zion?

Judah ha-Levi was not content to sing to his lady-love—Jerusalem—from afar. He resolved to meet her face to face. This faithful lover of Zion could not rest until he himself stood upon its sacred soil. Therefore, upon the death of his wife, he decided to leave behind his only daughter and grandson, his host of friends, his comfortable home, his college at Toledo

and his pupils who loved him as a father. His heart was in Zion, what else could he do! "I am in the West, but my heart is in the East," he said. Finally, about the year 1140 he started on his journey to Palestine.

*9. Describe Judah ha-Levi's journey to Zion.*

Judah's journey was less of a pilgrimage than a triumph. In all the great cities, from Spain to Palestine, his songs were sung and his name was honored. On the sea, though confined in the narrow wooden cabin, where there was no room either to sit or to stand, and sea-sick and in weak health, Judah's soul yet lost none of its poetic power:

A watery waste the sinful world has grown,  
With no dry spot whereon the eye can rest,  
No man, no beast, no bird to gaze upon,  
Can all be dead, with silent sleep possessed?  
Oh, how I long the hills and vales to see,  
To find myself on barren steppes were bliss;  
I peer about, but nothing greeteth me,  
Naught save the ships, the clouds, the waves' abyss,  
The crocodile which rushes from the deeps;  
The flood foams gray; the whirling waters reel,  
Now like its prey whereon at last it sweeps,  
The ocean swallows up the vessel's keel.  
The billows rage,—exult, O soul of mine,  
Soon shalt thou enter the Lord's sacred shrine.

*(Translated by Emma Lazarus)*

After a stormy sea-passage, Judah arrived in Alexandria, Egypt, where he was received with great hospitality and warmth. Here he wrote the following poem:

Wondrous is this land to see,  
With perfume its meadows laden,  
But more fair than all to me,  
Is yon slender, gentle maiden.  
Ah, Time's swift flight I fain would stay  
Forgetting that my locks are gray.

The Jews of Egypt urged Juda ha-Levi to stay among them. He was offered handsome gifts but he declined these, saying that God had blessed him so plentifully with wealth that he had brought much money with him from home, and had still left plenty behind. Judah was determined to leave Egypt to hasten to his lady-love. He set out once more on his journey and made his way to Tyre and then to Damascus in Syria, where he was greatly honored by the Jewish communities.

*10. Did Judah ha-Levi arrive in Jerusalem?*

From Damascus, we have only tradition, not facts, to guide us as to Judah's further steps. We only know that he left from there for the Holy City, and that is all. It is not known where or when the poet died. A legend relates that as he came near Jerusalem, an Arab horseman pierced him with his lance and he died. Saddened by the sight of the Holy City, Judah ha-Levi sang his most beautiful Song of Zion, which has been included in the synagogue service for the Fast of Ab:

Zion, wilt thou not ask if peace's wing  
Shadows the captives that ensue thy peace,  
Left lonely from thine ancient shepherding?  
Lo! west and east, north and south—world wide,

All those from far and near, without surcease,  
Salute thee: Peace and Peace from every side.  
(*Translated by Nina Davis*)

11. *What position does Judah occupy in Jewish poetry?*

Judah ha-Levi was recognized by his contemporaries as the chief Jewish national poet, and he still ranks as the greatest Hebrew poet, the poet laureate, since the Psalmist. Every Jew will recall the name of Judah ha-Levi with affection, enthusiasm and reverence. He possessed real religious genius and a passionate pride in Judaism and the Jewish people, which few writers have expressed in such eloquent words. The following is the tribute of the great poet Heine:

Ah! he was the greatest poet,  
Torch and starlight to his age,  
Beacon-light unto his people;  
Such a mighty and a wondrous  
Pillar of poetic fire,  
Led the caravan of sorrow  
Of his people Israel  
Through the desert of their exile.  
Pure and truthful, fair and blameless,  
Was his song, and thus his soul was.  
When the Lord that soul created,  
With great joy His work beheld He,  
And He kissed that soul of beauty,  
Of His kiss the fair, faint echo  
Thrills through each song of Halevi,  
By the Lord's grace sanctified.  
(*Translated by Israel Zangwill*)



12. *Tell of Judah ha-Levi as a philosopher.*

Judah ha-Levi was not only the greatest Hebrew poet, but also one of the ablest philosophers and expounders of Judaism in the Middle Ages. About the year 1141, Judah ha-Levi composed a philosophical work on Judaism, which placed him in the front rank of Jewish thinkers. When the Jewish kingdom of the Chazars was destroyed (see chapter XI), the royal family took refuge in Spain. From their descendants no doubt Judah learned of the arguments before King Bulan, which led to his conversion to Judaism. Judah ha-Levi wrote his book *Ha-Kuzari* (The Book of the Chazars) in the form of a discussion between King Bulan and the rabbi, the Jewish representative, who argued before him, and they are made to express his own views on religion and philosophy. The *Kuzari* thus takes the form of a defence of Judaism against Christians and Moslems, and also against those Jews who are either indifferent to their religion or, like the Karaites, oppose tradition.

13. *What is the content of the "Kuzari"?*

(1) The Truth of the Jewish Religion:

In the *Kuzari*, Judah ha-Levi takes the firm stand that Judaism cannot be affected by philosophy because it stands on a firm basis, the basis of historical facts. The Jewish religion entered the world not gradually, little by little, but suddenly. It was revealed by God through Moses on Mount Sinai to a vast multitude of people, to millions of men, who had sufficient means of inquiring and investigating whether they were deceived by some trickery. Moreover, all the miracles that took place before and after the reve-

lation on Mount Sinai were performed in the presence of many people. These facts, therefore, establish the certainty of Judaism and prove its truth. In one of his poems, Judah ha-Levi appeals to his fellow-Jews in the following words:

Do not be enticed by the wisdom of the Greeks,  
Which only bears fair blossoms, but no fruit.

(2) The Attitude of Judaism toward Life:

Judaism does not urge us to lead the life of a hermit, but guides us in the middle path, equally distant from the extremes of too much and too little. Judaism desires to see in its followers a joyful disposition. A man deserving to be called pious from the standpoint of the Jewish religion does not flee from the world nor despise life. He does not deny himself the pleasures of life, but, within the limits set by the divine hand itself, is a righteous guardian of his body and soul.

(3) Obedience to God's Laws and Commands:

In Judah ha-Levi's view, the service of God and His laws is not a burden to man. "The servants of time," he says, "are servants of servants, but the servant of the Lord is alone free. When each man seeks his lot in life, my soul exclaims: The Lord is my lot." Man's contrition on a fast-day is not more acceptable to God than his gladness on a Sabbath or festival, if only his rejoicing come from a devout and dutiful heart. Therefore, Judaism is against fasting and bodily suffering as a means of finding favor in the eyes of God. Just as prayer requires reflection and devotion, so does joy in God's commandments and the

study of His law. We must rejoice in the love of Him who gave the law, for the gift thereof was an act of His love toward us.

(4) The Place of Prayer in the Life of a Devout Man:

The pious worshipper must be like a prince—he must have full control of his bodily kingdom—an undisputed master of all his powers, inclinations and desires. The tongue of the devout worshipper harmonizes with his thoughts, so that his prayer is not a mere mechanical habit, like the speech of a raven or a parrot, but each word contains thought and devotion. Prayer of this nature is food for the soul. It does for the soul what meat does for the body—sustains and strengthens it. The blessing of one prayer lasts till the next, just as the strength obtained from breakfast lasts till dinner. To attain spiritual joy in communion with God, the worshipper must bring himself to the right frame of mind. Just as the drunken man cannot truly enjoy the pleasures offered to him, so the worshipper can derive little joy and satisfaction from his religious acts unless they are accompanied by deep spiritual understanding.

(5) The Suffering of Israel:

The suffering of Israel, says Judah ha-Levi, is no evidence of decay or reason for abandoning hope, just as the power of Christians and Moslems is no proof of the truth of their doctrines. Poverty and misery have more merit with God than inflated pride and greatness. "Israel is the heart of the nations," says Judah ha-Levi. Just as the heart sustains the greatest share of bodily pain, and is the most sensitive of all the organs of the body, suffering sadness,

anxiety, fear and other emotions, so Israel has been the most unmercifully treated of the nations of the world. The Jewish people, however, have not perished. In truth, says Judah ha-Levi, to the Jews, in their oppressed condition, may be applied the picture of the Prophet Ezekiel, who described the dry bones, scattered and lifeless, uniting together, being clothed with flesh and skin, having new breath breathed into them, and standing erect as a living body. The prophet asked: "Can these bones live?" (Ezekiel xxxvii). Thus, says Judah, if the Jewish people give way to despair and doubt in similar fashion, they should remember their past glories and God's favors to them, and take pride in observing His law.

(6) Israel Among the Nations:

Israel's dispersion among the nations, says Judah ha-Levi, was the will of God to impart to the nations of the earth the spirit with which Israel is endowed. The two religions, Christianity and Islam, are the preparation for the Messiah we expect. If there had been no Israelites, there would have been no Torah. Israel's position in the world is not derived from Moses, but the pre-eminence of Moses is due to Israel, for he was the instrument through whom God's blessing was assured to them. "We are called," says Judah, "not the people of Moses, but the people of God." When the nations of the world will truly acknowledge the One God, then will they also revere the seed of their faith—Judaism and the Jewish people—which they formerly despised.

## XIX

### THE CRUSADES

1096-1190

*1. What was the Jewish position in Western Europe preceding the Crusades?*

Prior to the Crusades, the Jews of France enjoyed a period of prosperity; they owned property, and formed independent communities with their own Mayors. The Jews of Germany, under the Emperor Henry IV, also lived in peace. They were allowed to own land and employ Christians, although this was forbidden by the Church. The Chief Rabbi had authority in lawsuits, and the Jews had special quarters, surrounded by a wall, allotted to them in the various towns, in order to protect themselves against mob-outbreak. The Jews of Italy, too, enjoyed freedom to such a degree that the Jewish community of Rome was not bound to pay taxes. The same conditions also prevailed in England, and in London many Jews attained such wealth that their houses had the appearance of royal palaces.

*2. Was there any omen of approaching evil upon the Jews?*

The authority of the Popes was steadily advancing, and was greatly increased under Pope Greg-

ory VII, who commenced his rule in 1073. He was a man of great ambition, and desired to make himself more powerful than any king. Pope Gregory did not approve of the freedom given to the Jews in various countries. He excommunicated the Emperor Henry IV, and forced him to do penance in the middle of winter clothed only in his shirt. He then turned his attention to the Jews. In 1078 he issued a law forbidding Jews to occupy any post in Christendom. He also wrote to King Alfonso VI of Castile, telling him that allowing Jews to exercise authority over Christians was "the same as oppressing God's church and exalting Satan's synagogue."

### *3. What were the causes of the Crusades?*

(1) For 400 years, mosques, erected on the site of ruined churches, had stood unchallenged on the spot which was most sacred to all Christians. They represented the supremacy of Islam and were a religious eyesore to Catholic Europe. The desire, therefore, to drive the Moslems out of the Holy Land had been gradually growing. (2) It was regarded a religious duty by pious Christians to make pilgrimages to the tomb of Jesus in Jerusalem. The Christian pilgrims were protected by the Moslems, and were not interfered with. When, however, the Turks captured Palestine in 1075, they insulted and oppressed the pilgrims. This all the more strengthened the desire of the Christians to capture the land.

### *4. What was the immediate cause of the Crusades?*

One of the pilgrims to Jerusalem was a French monk named Peter the Hermit, who visited the Holy

Land in 1093. Upon his return, he went to Rome and told the Pope Urban II tales of woe and outrage done by the Moslems to the Christians. The Pope himself, attending a Church Council in France, passionately described the sufferings of the Christians and the desecration of the churches at the hands of the Moslems, and urgently appealed to all Christians to hasten to the Holy Land, drive out "the enemies of God," and rescue the sacred places from the possession of the "infidels." The Pope authorized Peter the Hermit to preach a Crusade or "holy war" against the Moslems. Peter travelled through Italy and France calling upon the people to take up the cross.

*5. What was the response of the Christians?*

Many obeyed the summons. In 1096 an undisciplined rabble, which was said to have comprised 200,000 peasants and artisans, assembled in France ready to start their march to the Holy Land. This was the First Crusade. They used the cross as their emblem on the banners, and therefore the name given to these "holy wars" was Crusades, which means cross (crux—cross).

*6. What spirit animated the Crusaders?*

Although many of the Crusaders were probably inspired merely by religious zeal, yet large numbers of robbers, bigoted and savage, the scum of Europe, joined them in the hope of plunder. Therefore, as there were no Moslems near at hand, the champions of the cross turned their attention to the Jews, who, in their eyes, were just as much "infidels" and enemies of Christianity as the Moslems. Thus, cruelty in-

stead of charity began at home. This vast motley rabble of savage peasants fell upon the Jews of France, and massacred and plundered everywhere. At Cologne, Verdun, Metz, Mayence, Worms, Strassburg, Treves, Speyer and other cities they pillaged and murdered without mercy or restraint.

*7. Tell of the sufferings of the Jews at the hands of the Crusaders.*

With the wild cries of the Crusaders: "The Jews crucified our Saviour, and they must return to him or die," the Jews had the choice of baptism or death. Thousands preferred the death of martyrs. At Treves many Jews killed their own children, and women and girls loaded themselves with stones, and threw themselves into the river to escape baptism or disgrace. The rest of the community implored the Bishop for protection. But this hard-hearted representative of the Church replied he could do so only if they joined the Church. As their enemies were outside the town ready to kill them, the Jews decided to pretend to become Christians.

At Speyer the Jews resolutely refused to become baptized and fell under the blows of their murderers, crying: "The Lord our God is One."

When "the wolves of the forest"—as the Jewish chronicler calls the Crusaders—entered Worms, many Jews took refuge in the Bishop's palace; but the Bishop said he could protect them only if they became baptized. Accordingly, they asked to retire and consider the matter. As they did not return, the Bishop opened the door of the room where they had gone,



and found that they had killed themselves. The rest of the community was either massacred or committed suicide. Women killed their own tender babes. The Crusaders destroyed the Jewish houses, plundered their goods, and burnt the Scriptures found in the synagogues and houses.

At Mayence the Archbishop, a blood-thirsty man, invited the Jews to take refuge in his palace, and then called upon the Crusaders to fall upon the Jews. Over 1,300 Jews, men, young and old, women and children, were massacred in the presence of this treacherous officer of the Church, who afterwards shared the spoils taken from the murdered Jews.

In Bohemia and other countries, as they swept across Europe, the ruthless, savage Crusaders had only one object in mind: massacre and plunder. The Jews of Cologne, on the other hand, were protected by the citizens and a humane Bishop, who prevented the majority from sharing the fate of their brethren elsewhere. This noble Bishop, Herman III, assisted the Jews to depart secretly from the city, and to take refuge in seven neighboring towns and villages belonging to his diocese. The Crusaders, however, at last discovered their refuge-places and massacred them. Many Jews ended their lives in lakes and rivers, following the example of Samuel ben Yechiel. This learned and pious man, standing in the water and pronouncing a blessing, killed his own son, a handsome and strong youth, and as the victim said "Amen," all those looking on, crying: "Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One," threw themselves into the water and drowned themselves.

8. *What was the attitude of the Kings toward the Jews?*

The rulers of the countries through which the Crusaders passed were, as a rule, desirous of protecting the Jews, but they were seldom able to prevent the massacres. Emperor Henry IV of Germany was at the time of the massacres occupied in war with Italy, and the wildest anarchy prevailed in Germany. Upon hearing of the horrible cruelties done to the Jews, the Emperor made the princes of Germany take an oath that they would protect the Jews. He confiscated the property of the Archbishop of Mayence, and permitted the Jews who had been forcibly baptized to return to Judaism.

9. *Tell of the capture of Jerusalem.*

By the time the Crusaders reached Constantinople, their hands already stained in blood, half their number disappeared through sickness and other causes. However, they crossed into Syria, where they were severely defeated by the Turks, and only 3,000 escaped. Peter the Hermit, so brave of words, was the earliest cowardly deserter. In the meantime, a fresh army of 600,000 disciplined soldiers led by royal princes had arrived. This powerful force invaded Syria, obtained possession of Antioch in 1098, and on July 15, 1099, captured Jerusalem.

10. *What was the fate of the inhabitants of Jerusalem?*

Unlike the Moslems who, when they had captured Jerusalem in 637, had spared the lives of Christians and allowed them to retain their property and

churches, the savage Crusaders butchered thousands of Moslems. It was said that they rode in blood up to their horses' knees, as they slaughtered the "infidels." The Jews had no better fate. The Crusaders drove all the Jews into a synagogue, set fire to it, and burned them alive. Within a week there was not a single Moslem or Jew alive in Jerusalem.

*11. What was the cause of the Second Crusade?*

In 1144 the Sultan of Damascus threatened to invade Palestine, which since 1099 had been a Christian kingdom. The pious Abbot Bernard of Clairvaux, following the example of Peter the Hermit, eloquently preached the desirability of undertaking another "holy war" to assist the Christians in the Holy Land.

*12. What was the response of the Christians?*

The efforts of Bernard were crowned with success. The Pope issued a Bull releasing all those who joined the Crusade from any debts which they owed to Jews, and also granting absolution for offences against the Church. Were these not stimulating to the masses? And plunder! So an army of over a million men joined the Second Crusade, which took place in 1146, under the leadership of King Louis VII of France and the Emperor of Germany, Conrad III.

*13. What was the fate of the Jews during the Second Crusade?*

Fanatical priests tried to persuade the king to confiscate all the property of "these accursed beings," as they called the Jews.

The Abbot Peter of Clugny said: "Of what use is

it to go forth to seek the enemies of Christendom in distant lands, while the blasphemous Jews, who are worse than the Moslems, are permitted in our very midst to scoff with impunity at Christ"? A frenzied monk named Rudolph stirred up the people of Germany to slay "the murderers of our Lord," as they called the Jews, and many were massacred in Treves and Wurtzburg and other German towns. Jews were also expelled from Magdeburg and Halle. The French Jews were, however, fortunate on this occasion to escape death, and to suffer only the penalty of confiscation.

In Carenton, France, however, the Jews made a fortress of a house and defended themselves to the last man. At Rameru, too, the mob attacked the congregation while worshipping on the Festival of Pentecost, and almost killed the famous Rabbi Jacob Tam, whose commentary on the Talmud made him a great European authority. The Jews of Bohemia again suffered severely when the Crusaders marched through the country.

*14. What was the attitude of Bernard and the Kings toward the Jews?*

It is to the credit of Bernard that the Jewish victims of the Second Crusade were fewer than in the first, as he did his best to prevent the attacks made upon the Jews. The King of France and the Emperor of Germany also afforded protection to the Jews.

*15. What was the result of the Second Crusade?*

The Second Crusade was a total failure, and the vast army was obliged to return to Europe.

*16. Tell of the recapture of Jerusalem by the Turks.*

In 1171 the great, wise and chivalrous Saladin deposed the last of the Fatimid Caliphs, who claimed descent from Fatima, Mohammed's daughter, and henceforth reigned in Egypt. In 1174 he took possession of Damascus, and decided to capture Jerusalem. Saladin assembled a large army in 1187, defeated the Christians and captured Palestine. Jerusalem was once more in the hands of the Moslems.

*17. What was the fate of the inhabitants of Jerusalem?*

Unlike the savage Crusaders who mercilessly massacred the Moslems when they captured Jerusalem in 1099, Saladin was generous to his enemies, and returned good for evil. They were permitted to retain the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, and to live and worship in peace. The abolition of Christian rule was naturally welcomed by the few remaining Jews in Palestine.

*18. Tell of the Third Crusade.*

As a result of the conquest of Jerusalem by Saladin, a Third Crusade took place in 1189, in which Richard I of England, Emperor Frederick II of Germany and Philip Augustus of France participated. The Christians took possession of Acre (Acco) and other parts of Palestine, but failed to recapture Jerusalem.

*19. Tell of the other Crusades.*

There were many later Crusades; they numbered nine in all. Emperor Frederick II of Germany,

by a treaty with the Sultan, occupied the Holy City for ten years, between 1229 and 1239, after which period the Moslems again took possession. In 1291 the Christians were driven out of Acre, and from that time until the World War of 1914–1918, the whole of Palestine was under the Moslem rule.

*20. What was the fate of the Jews during the other Crusades?*

The later Crusades did not have the same disastrous results for the Jews as the first two Crusades, but they were made the excuse for attacks on the Jews, and levies were made upon them for the expenses of the crusading armies. In 1190 during the Third Crusade, the Jews in many cities were severely attacked, and especially at York, England, where about 1,000 Jewish souls perished in one day.

## EVIL RESULTS OF THE CRUSADES

*21. What was the political evil effect of the Crusades upon the Jews?*

The protection which the rulers of France and Germany had given their Jewish subjects had been purchased with their political freedom. The Jews of Germany, who up to the time of the Crusades had been free as the Germans or Romans, henceforth became the property of the emperors and were called *servi camerae* (slaves of the chamber, or body slaves). They were not serfs like the lowest class of the population, which had to render personal service to their feudal lords. But the emperor regarded the Jews as

his chattels, and both they and their property could be bought and sold as he chose. In later times, the Jews were looked upon as bondmen and dependent slaves. In France a similar attitude was adopted. In both countries the Jews had to pay heavy taxes for the right to remain in the country.

*22. What was the economic evil effect of the Crusades upon the Jews?*

Before the Crusades the Jews had practically a monopoly of trade in eastern products. The closer contact, however, between Europe and the East brought about by the Crusades, raised up a class of merchant traders among the Christians. As a result, restrictions on the sale of goods by Jews became frequent from this time onward. Then again, the destruction of whole communities and the closing of schools created a large class of wandering Jewish merchants and students, who suffered terrible privation as they journeyed from town to town. Each community provided special funds for the relief of these wanderers, and in many towns a "communal inn" (*hachnasath orchim*) was established, where they could obtain food and shelter.

*23. What was the social evil effect of the Crusades upon the Jews?*

The religious fanaticism, which was stirred up by the Crusades, burned as fiercely against the Jews as enemies of Christianity as against the Moslems. They were hated and despised, persecuted and oppressed.

*24. What was the intellectual evil effect of the Crusades upon the Jews?*

To the persecuted Jews everything now had a gloomy aspect. All joy and happiness died out among them, and they clothed themselves only in sackcloth and ashes. For this reason, the intellectual efforts of the Jews of Germany bore the stamp of degeneracy. Their poems consisted only of elegies and lamentations, which were tasteless, and even in the study of the Talmud very little work of note was accomplished by them. The condition of the times brought in its train some narrowing of the Jewish thought and the creation of a certain amount of superstitious belief and practice.

*25. What was the Jewish source of delight and inspiration in time of oppression?*

The study of the Talmud became their chief balm for the wounds inflicted by the Crusaders. The pleasure resulting from creative thought ruled in the schools, and the house of learning became the refuge of the unfortunate oppressed. Many distracted, sorrowful souls found consolation by wrapping themselves up in their traditional literature. In the midst of suffering, the oppressed people did not forget their ancient faith. Thus sang a Jewish poet, Kalonymos ben Judah (1160):

Yea, they slay us and they smite,  
Vex our souls with sore affright;  
All the closer cleave we, Lord,  
To Thine everlasting word.

*(Translated by E. H. Plumptre)*



## XX

### COMMENTATORS OF THE TALMUD

*1. In what field of learning were the Jews of Germany and Northern France engaged?*

While the Jews of Spain were engaged in all other literary activities, in addition to the study of Hebrew literature, the Jews of Germany and Northern France were absorbed almost entirely in one particular class of study. Their life was bound up in the Bible and Talmud, and they gave all their thought to the teaching of the traditional Jewish literature. As a result, commentators of great importance and renown, who performed great services to Jewish literature and to Judaism, arose in France and Germany.

RABBI GERSHOM "THE LIGHT OF THE  
EXILE"  
960-1028

*2. Who was the first commentator of the Talmud?*

Rabbi Gershom ben Judah was the first important European commentator. Rabbi Gershom was born at Metz, France, in 960 and died at Mayence, Germany, in 1028. He received his Jewish education at the College of Narbonne over which Judah ben Meir ha-Cohen (Sir Leontin), one of the greatest authorities of the time, presided. For some unknown

reason, Rabbi Gershom settled in Mayence, where he founded a famous college, to which pupils flocked from all parts, and, in fact, he was the founder of Talmudic studies in France and Germany. His commentary, called *Rabbenu Gershom*, is distinguished for clearness and directness. He was at once recognized as an authority by the German, French and Italian Jewish communities. Questions were submitted to him by the various Jewish communities, and his answers were accepted as law. His college dispensed with the necessity of referring matters to the Babylonian colleges, and thus assisted the decline of their authority, to which the college of Cordova had already contributed.

*3. Why is Rabbi Gershom called "The Light of the Exile"?*

Rabbi Gershom did not earn his title "The Light of the Exile" simply as a Talmudic scholar and commentator. To him all turned as trusted guide in the varied perplexities created by the new conditions and environment, and his guidance and decisions brought them "light."

*4. State four of his important decrees.*

In the year 1000 Rabbi Gershom called a Jewish Synod (assembly), and decreed the following:

(1) Prohibition of Polygamy. He made a law that a man should have but one wife, for monogamy (one wife) is always presented as the ideal married state, even in the Bible.

(2) The consent of the wife was necessary for a divorce, while according to the Talmud the husband could divorce her against her wish. (In fact, this sen-

timent had already found expression even among the rabbis of the Talmud, in the school of Shammai, but its realization took place in Rabbi Gershom's time.)

(3) Those Jews who were forced by cruelty to forsake their faith for a time, and afterwards returned to their religion, must not be reproached. He threatened to excommunicate any one who did the contrary. (Alas! this very experience came home to Rabbi Gershom in the case of his own son, who became a Christian during the persecution of the Jews in Mayence in 1012.)

(4) Prohibition against reading a letter addressed to another, even though it be not sealed. In those times, communications with one's friends were carried on by means of travelers who happened to be going in the direction required. Therefore, this decree was of utmost importance. Disobedience was punishable with excommunication.

#### *5. What was Jewry's response to these decrees?*

Although obedience to Rabbi Gershom was voluntary, as he was in no way vested with official authority, yet so great was the respect felt for Rabbi Gershom, that all gladly accepted his decisions as final authority for Jewish practice, as Biblical and Talmudic decrees.

### RABBI ISAAC ALFASI 1013-1103

#### *1. Tell of the life of Isaac Alfasi.*

Isaac Alfasi was born in 1013 in Fez, in North Africa (whence he derived his name) and devoted

himself exclusively to the study of the Talmud, under Rabbi Chananel and Rabbi Nissim, the recognized rabbinical authorities of the age. After their death, Alfasi took their place, and was regarded as the chief expounder of the Talmud. Because of two informers who denounced him to the government, Isaac Alfasi fled to Spain, where he taught at the colleges of Cordova and Granada, and finally settled at Lucena. Among his numerous pupils were Joseph Ibn-Migash (the teacher of Maimonides) and the poets Judah ha-Levi and Moses Ibn-Ezra, both of whom wrote poems in his honor.

### 2. *What is Alfasi's chief work?*

Isaac Alfasi's most important work is his *Halachoth* (i. e. laws), often referred to as the "Rif" (Rabbi Isaac Fasi) from the initials of Alfasi's name, or simply "Alfas." His work is a compendium of the legal decisions of the rabbis of the Talmud in condensed form, and is thus called "The Little Talmud." His work was studied like the Talmud itself, and soon had its own commentators and critics. His work was highly praised by Maimonides.

## NATHAN BEN YECHIEL

### 3. *Who was Nathan ben Yechiel?*

Nathan ben Yechiel of Rome was another commentator of the Talmud. He compiled a Dictionary of the Talmud about the year 1000, called *Aruch*, and it is still a standard book of reference and was used by Rashi.



*Traditional Portrait of Isaac Alfasi*



## XXI

### RASHI, PRINCE OF COMMENTATORS

1040-1105

#### *1. Tell of the early life of Rashi.*

Rabbi Solomon ben Isaac, popularly known as "Rashi" from the initials of his name, was born in 1040 in the town of Troyes, the capital of the province of Champagne in the North of France. His mother came of a family of poets, and his father was a Talmudic scholar. A legend states that Rashi's father, Isaac, possessed a precious jewel of great value. Some Christians, who wished to take it from him, lured him into a boat and demanded the jewel. Thereupon Isaac threw the jewel into the water. Then a mysterious voice was heard to say: "A son will be born to thee, Isaac, who will enlighten the eyes of all Israel." Thus, the precious jewel cast upon the water was returned to him in human form. Rashi studied at the colleges of Worms, Mayence and Speyer, which were the principal centers of Talmudic learning in those days. At the age of 25 he settled permanently in his native town of Troyes.

#### *2. Tell of Rashi's life at Troyes.*

Rashi returned to Troyes master of all rabbinic literature. He was appointed rabbi of the Jewish com-

munity, and commenced to teach from the rich store of knowledge which he had already gathered. His piety, modesty and gentleness, in addition to his scholarship, endeared him to his fellow-Jews, and his college became famous in all parts of Europe. Rashi was soon recognized as the chief Talmudic authority in Europe, and Jewish communities addressed problems to him for solution. Pupils flocked to him from all parts. Like most other rabbis, he accepted no salary, but supported himself and his wife (whom he married when he was still a student) by vine cultivation, a common occupation among the Jews in Champagne which is still famous for its wine, especially for champagne, which is called after the name of the district.

*3. How many children did Rashi have?*

Rashi had no sons; his only children were three daughters, who all married scholars: Rabbi Meir ben Samuel of Rameru (not far from Troyes), Rabbi Judah ben Nathan and Rabbi Ephraim. One of his daughters is said to have been learned in the Talmud, and assisted her father in writing answers to the questions submitted to him.

*4. What are Rashi's scholarly achievements?*

Rashi has left two great monuments to his memory—his commentaries on the Bible and the Talmud. His only other known writings are a few hymns for the use in the synagogue on fast-days, and his answers to questions submitted to him. Rashi's commentaries have justly earned him the title of Prince of Jewish Commentators.



5. *What is the content of Rashi's commentary on the Bible?*

Rashi's commentary on the Bible comprises both an explanation of the grammatical construction of the words and an interpretation of the text. Rashi's *Commentary on the Pentateuch* (Torah) became a text-book for young and old, and is the first dated printed book in Hebrew (1475). It has given religious stimulus to whole communities. Here and there his commentary consists of the translation of difficult words into French, his vernacular, as the Jews of his day spoke the language of the country. His commentary contains more than two thousand words in the French of the Crusades.

6. *What was Rashi's method of explaining the Bible?*

There were two principal methods used by the rabbis in explaining the Bible. One was "Peshat," which took the literal meaning of the text, and the other was "Derash," which gave explanations which were not found in the actual words. The method of "Derash"—which was adopted in the "Midrash" (Midrash is part of the Talmudic literature which explains the Bible in a homiletic way)—allowed the imagination free play in finding meanings behind the ordinary sense of the text, which it sought to make agree with traditional Judaism. On the other hand, "Peshat" was final—the words were to be accepted without any bias. Rashi used both methods in his Bible commentary. When the "Midrash" makes a simple explanation of the text, Rashi adopts it; where there are several explanations, he takes the simplest. Sometimes, however, he rejects the interpretation of the

"Midrash," and gives what he regards as the natural meaning. "Scripture," said Rashi, "must be interpreted according to its plain, natural sense, each word according to the context." Traditional explanations, however, may also be accepted, as it is said (Jeremiah xxiii.29): "Is not my word like as fire?", *i. e.* consisting of many sparks. "And like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces," *i. e.* therefore, capable of various explanations.

*7. Why did Rashi adopt the second method also?*

Rashi bore in mind that the Bible was not only studied for its own sake as a collection of wonderful literature, but was a text-book of morality and the foundation of Jewish beliefs. He, therefore, introduced into his commentary, and thus popularized, a vast number of moral sayings, legends and traditional interpretations to be found in the "Midrash" and other rabbinical literature. His commentary was thus suitable, and has in fact been used for general reading as well as for scientific study. It was and is still often made the basis for Sabbath afternoon addresses in the synagogue, or for lectures to students.

*8. What is the content of Rashi's commentary on the Talmud?*

While Rashi's commentary on the Bible was intended for popular use—for the masses—his commentary on the Talmud was a work for the student. It was an immense undertaking, for Rashi covered nearly all the thirty-three treatises of the Talmud. He gave the best years of his life in writing the commen-

tary. He revised the text of the Talmud, having compared the different versions of the manuscripts, and explained the language, grammar and the thought and meaning of each opinion of the rabbis. Rashi's commentary on the Talmud became the standard interpretation, and his text the standard text. Without his commentary (which since the year 1520 has always been printed with the Talmud as part and parcel of it), the Talmud would almost be a closed book.

9. *Why is Rashi called "Prince of Commentators"?*

Rashi's commentaries have many great qualities. In his style Rashi is a model commentator. He is a master of detail, yet he is simple and clear, so that "to write like Rashi" came to mean to write clearly and intelligibly. Rashi possessed the gift of condensed expression; he was concise, seldom using a word too much or too little. It was said of him that one letter of Rashi was worth whole pages of other authors, and "in Rashi's time a drop of ink was worth a piece of gold."

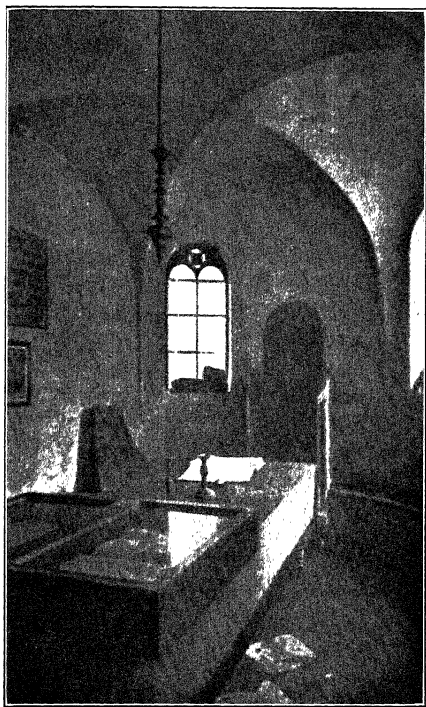
10. *Tell of the influence of Rashi's Bible Commentary.*

Rashi's Bible commentary remained the most popular explanation of the Bible in spite of later ones showing scholarly learning. Abraham Ibn-Ezra's commentary never superseded it. About fifty commentaries were written on his commentary. Rashi's commentary was used by other distinguished Jewish commentators, such as Abraham Ibn-Ezra, Nachmanides and Isaac Abarbanel, as well as by Christian

scholars, who translated it into Latin. Luther's Bible translation, so largely responsible for the Reformation, was greatly indebted to Rashi's commentary.

*11. Describe Rashi's character.*

In his answers to questions submitted to him by the Jewish communities, Rashi reveals his noble, simple, gentle character. (1) Rashi was modest. He was never ashamed to admit that he had made a mistake, and was always grateful to a correspondent for pointing it out. When he could not give a satisfactory explanation of some difficult matter, occasionally he would say: "I cannot understand," or "I do not know." (2) Rashi was a lover of peace. He severely condemned those who stirred up trouble in the community or in their families. We see him sternly rebuking a man who failed to comply with a promise of marriage, and protecting a widow who had been deprived of her property. (3) Rashi was charitable. A story is told of Rashi that once, in the course of his travels, he met a monk who was stopping at the same inn. The monk fell ill, and Rashi cared for him like a brother and succeeded in curing him. When the monk started to thank him, Rashi interrupted him, and said: "Thou owest me nothing in return. Divided as we are by our religion, we are united by charity, which my religion imposes on me as a duty. If thou comest upon a Jew in misfortune, help him as I have helped thee." (4) Rashi was noble. The First Crusade occurred during the last years of Rashi's life; perhaps it hastened his death. When the Emperor Henry IV permitted the Jews, who had accepted Christianity under the Crusaders' sword, to return to their faith,



*Interior of Rashi's Chapel at Worms*



some of the Jews would not receive them. Rashi, like Rabbi Gershom, protested against that attitude, saying: "Far be it from us to reject those that have returned to Judaism."

Rashi, like many rabbis of old, was, indeed, a saint, lacking only the title. He died at Troyes in 1105.

## XXII

### THE TOSAFISTS

1105-1328

#### *1. Who were Rashi's worthy successors?*

Rashi's worthy successors were his pupils, who continued the work left unfinished by their great teacher. They closely examined their master's writings, commented upon, and added to them. But they had so much respect for Rashi that they did not present their opinions independently, but attached them as supplements to his commentary. They were thus called Tosafists, from the Hebrew word "Tosafoth," which means supplements or additions, the name given to their work.

#### *2. Who were the earliest Tosafists?*

The earliest tosafists, who carried on the work of Rashi, were members of his own family—his two sons-in-law, Rabbi Judah ben Nathan (commonly called "Riban," from the initials of his name) and Rabbi Meir ben Samuel; his three grandsons, Isaac, Samuel (popularly known as "Rashbam," from the initials of his name) and Jacob Tam, the sons of



Rabbi Meir, and Isaac ben Asher ha-Levi (called "Riba," from the initials of his name) of Speyer, also connected with the family of Rashi.

*3. What is the content of the work of the Tosafists?*

The work of the tosafists consists of: (1) A thorough examination of Rashi's commentary, accepting or rejecting their master's explanations. (2) Discussions leading to a perfect understanding of the text of the Talmud. (3) The practical application of the results of such a study to the civil laws, to the laws of marriage and divorce and to religious practice. This method of study brought to light many new legal ordinances. Rashi's commentary was the basis of their work, and the "Tosafoth" constituted a commentary on Rashi in much the same way as, in the Talmud, the "Gemara" is a commentary on the "Mishnah." They took the text of the Talmud, turned it about, viewed it from every possible angle, and solved the most difficult problems with the greatest ease, as though they were simple examples submitted to children. But the work of the tosafists was not a case of discussion for the sake of discussion. The tosafists were anxious to throw every possible light on the Talmud and to insure the greatest accuracy.

RABBI JACOB TAM  
1100-1171

*4. Who was the leading Tosafist?*

Rabbi Jacob Tam, grandson of Rashi, was the most distinguished tosafist in the period immediately

following Rashi's death. He was born in 1100 in the town of Rameru, not far from Troyes. He knew Rashi only when he was a child. Jacob was called "Rabbenu Tam," from the Hebrew word "Tam," meaning "plain man" or "man of integrity," which was applied to the Patriarch Jacob in the Bible (Genesis xxv.27). Like his grandfather, he was a man of pious, amiable, modest disposition. He was engaged in business, but spent most of his time in the study of the Talmud. During the Second Crusade (1147) Rabbenu Tam was nearly killed, managing to escape with his books. He was the principal founder of the school of tosafists. Questions were sent to him, exclusively, from everywhere—France, Germany, Spain, England, and Italy—and all the rabbinical authorities of his time accepted his decisions with the deepest reverence. At one time about eighty scholars, who were ordained rabbis themselves, received their education from him. He died in Troyes in 1171.

5. *What are Rabbenu Tam's important decrees?*

Shortly after the attack on him by the Crusaders, Rabbenu Tam went to Troyes, where a Rabbinical Synod (assembly of rabbis), over which he presided, took place in 1160, in which one hundred and fifty rabbis participated. With excommunication as the penalty for disobedience, the following decrees were adopted:

(1) Dispute between Jews must be settled in a Jewish and not a Christian court, unless both parties agreed to have them settled in the latter court. The ravages in Israel brought about by the Crusades made

them feel that only "all Israel are brethren," because no one else acted in a "brotherly" fashion toward them.

(2) Any damages which might result to one party because the case was brought in a non-Jewish court were to be made good by the other party.

(3) No one should seek an office in the synagogue with the assistance of Gentile influence, but he should be elected in an open manner by the majority of the members of the congregation.

(4) Most severe were their denunciations against "informers," for such traitors brought incalculable woe to their already much-persecuted brethren.

At other rabbinical assemblies, over which Rab-benu Tam presided, the following decrees were adopted:

(1) No one should question the legality of a divorce document (*Get* in Hebrew), after it had been delivered to the wife, on the ground that the document had not been written in the proper form prescribed by law. This law was important because hypercritical or wicked men often criticized a divorce after it had been granted, causing the divorced parties much annoyance. (This decree is still in force, and is pronounced by the rabbi who performs the Jewish divorce.)

(2) The prohibition of polygamy (many wives) decreed by Rabbi Gershom in the year 1000 was reinforced. It was, however, decided that it could only be abolished by one hundred rabbis from three different provinces, and only in exceptional cases.

*6. How long did the Tosafist Period last?*

The tosafist period lasted over two hundred years, beginning with the death of Rashi in 1105 and ending with the death of the last tosafist, Rabbi Asher ben Yechiel of Paris, in the year 1328.

## XXIII

### MAIMONIDES

1135-1204

#### *1. Tell of the early life of Maimonides.*

Rabbi Moses ben Maimon (in Hebrew books he is usually called "Rambam" from the initials of his name, and Maimonides, which is a Greek form equivalent to the Hebrew "Maimuni," is the name by which he is now best known) was born in Cordova, on Pass-over eve, March 30, 1135, at one o'clock P.M. His father came of a family of scholars, which traced its descent through Judah the Prince, the compiler of the Mishnah, to the royal house of David. Maimonides' father, Maimon ben Joseph, was himself a great scholar. He was a learned Talmudist, who taught at the Cordova College, and wrote commentaries on the Talmud and other Jewish subjects, as well as on mathematics and astronomy. Under the guidance of his scholarly father, the young Moses eagerly imbibed an interest in all branches of knowledge. He soon acquired a thorough grounding in the Talmud and other rabbinical writings. He attended lectures on various branches of science at the Cordova University, and mathematics, medicine, languages, philosophy and the

works of Greek and Arabic writers were all his familiar friends.

*2. Why did Maimonides leave Cordova?*

Just about the time when Maimonides was Bar Mitzvah, in 1148, the Almohads invaded Spain and captured Cordova. The Jews had to choose between Islam and exile. Maimon, as well as the majority of the Jews, chose exile, and, with his young son Moses and the rest of his family, he spent the next few years wandering about Spain.

*3. Tell of Maimonides' achievements during the years of exile.*

The miserable life of exile did not seem to hinder the mental growth of the young Moses. On the contrary, contact with the varied affairs of life gave his training a practical bent. He could not carry many books with him on his journey, so he had to make his memory his library. And what a wonderful memory he must have had! For, before he was twenty-three years of age, he had already finished notes on many sections of a Talmud commentary; he had drawn up a treatise on the Jewish calendar, based on astronomical principles; he had written a book on logic, and had commenced a commentary on the Mishnah. He soon became known, and many of the Spanish Jews submitted their problems to him for solution.

*4. Where did Maimonides go from Spain?*

About the year 1160, Maimonides' father decided to seek a home in another country. With his daughter and his two sons, Moses and David, Maimon

settled in Fez, in North Africa, which was also under the rule of the Almohads. There he and his son David supported the family in business, while Maimonides set up in practice as a doctor and continued his studies.

5. *What was the "Letter of Consolation"?*

The rule of the Almohads caused many Jews to lead a double life—as pretended Moslems. Such a life had its dangers, for the Jewish communities had begun to waver in their religious convictions. Only the strongest minds could continue to practice a religion which was forced upon them, and still inwardly remain faithful to the religion of their forefathers. The mass, however, gradually became accustomed to the new religion, and almost believed that God had chosen the Arabs instead of the Jews. Thereupon, Maimon soon after his arrival in Fez in 1160 wrote a letter of consolation in Arabic. He appealed to his fellow-Jews to find salvation in communion with God, praying in Arabic if they did not understand Hebrew, and observing part of the Jewish law if they were unable to keep all its commands.

6. *What was the "Iggereth Hashemad"?*

Under the Almohads, the Jews, in order to save their lives, were forced to recite the formula: "There is no God but Allah, and Mohammed is his prophet." A rabbi had declared that Jews who saved their own lives by reciting the Moslem declaration of faith could not be regarded as Jews, even if they observed Jewish practices in secret. Having realized that such a view might induce many ignorant Jews to give up Judaism altogether, Maimonides wrote an essay called

*Iggereth Hashemad* (letter concerning conversion), in which he pointed out that Jews were not asked to disobey the law, but merely to recite some empty words. There was nothing to prevent them from carrying out all the commands of the law in their homes. Therefore, if they observed Jewish practices in secret, but merely recited the empty formula in order to save their lives, they were still Jews. Maimonides, however, advised them to leave the country, so that they could practice their religion openly. He was only 25 years old at that time (1160), and this was his first entry into public life.

*7. What was the effect of Maimonides' letter upon the Jews?*

Maimonides' letter made so great an impression and his appeal was so successful that many Jews returned openly to Judaism, and some were in consequence seized and put to death. Maimonides was saved from a similar fate by a friend. On April 18, 1165, the family of Maimonides escaped in the middle of the night, and boarded a vessel bound for Palestine. During the voyage, which lasted a month, a terrific storm struck the vessel; but the danger passed, and Maimonides vowed that he would observe the day he left Fez and the day of the storm as fast-days. Eventually they arrived safely in the port of Acre (Acco), and the anniversary of this day was recognized as a family festival. They were received with great kindness by the Jewish community of Acre, and having spent several months there, they visited Jerusalem, where they prayed at the wall of the ancient Temple. They



also went to Hebron, where they visited the traditional graves of the Patriarchs in the Cave of Machpelah. There were, however, very few Jews in Palestine, so Maimonides left for Egypt.

*8. What was at that time the Jewish position in Egypt?*

Egypt was then under the rule of the Fatimid Caliphs, who claimed descent from Fatima, Mohammed's daughter. Under their rule, the Jewish communities, consisting of many thousands of families, enjoyed freedom. They had their own Nagid (prince) and governed their own affairs. Their prosperity and influence seem to have aroused some envy, and a Moslem poet sarcastically advised the Egyptians to become Jews, "for Heaven has become Jewish."

*9. Tell of Maimonides' suffering in Egypt.*

Maimonides settled in Cairo. The two brothers supported themselves by dealing in precious stones. Maimonides, however, was destined to suffer many misfortunes. His father died soon after their arrival in Egypt (beginning of 1166). His brother was drowned, and lost not only their fortunes, but also the money entrusted to him by other traders. Cruel slanders were spread about Maimonides, and he also suffered from a long and serious illness. On regaining health, Maimonides once more resumed an active life. He delivered public lectures and continued writing and studying. He refused, however, to accept money for his educational activities, so he earned a living by practising as a doctor.

*10. What was the "Letter to the South"?*

Maimonides soon became known as a great scholar in other countries, and his reputation caused an appeal to be made to him by some of the Jews of Yemen, in Arabia, where they were ill-treated by the Moslems in much the same fashion as in North Africa. The Jews outwardly pretended to adopt Islam. Meanwhile a Jewish convert to Islam announced that Mohammed was mentioned in the Torah, and that Islam was a new, divinely inspired religion which would supersede Judaism. As many of the Yemenite Jews were ignorant of their religion (this condition existed since pre-Mohammedan days), there was danger that they might adopt this view. In reply to the appeal from Yemen, Maimonides in 1172 sent his celebrated *Letter to the South* ("Iggereth Teman"—Letter to Yemen), written in Arabic, and provided a message of hope for the suffering Jews of Arabia. Persecution, said Maimonides, was a tribute to the presence of God in the camp of Israel. "The nations envy us our possession of the law. They contend not with us but with God." He advised his brethren in Yemen not to be misled by the new religions of Christianity and Islam, which were merely wrapped up in a Jewish covering. He warned them not to adulterate Judaism, not to exchange a living body of flesh and blood for a beautiful lifeless statue. Judaism was not based upon miracles, but upon the historical fact of the revelation at Mount Sinai. Even if all the miracles of Jesus were proved, he would still, therefore, not be the Messiah. He appealed to the Jews not to be discouraged by their troubles, which were a trial of faith and love. "Israel cannot be destroyed," added Maimonides. They must.

therefore, strengthen each other in their faith in God and in the law which He had revealed to Moses.

*11. What effect had this letter of Maimonides upon the Jews?*

Maimonides' letter, which was circulated among the Jews of Yemen, had such an excellent effect on them that they were strengthened in their faith in God and in their religion, and energetically participated in all the events affecting the welfare of the whole body of Jews. Afterwards, Maimonides used his influence with the Court of Saladin to stop the oppression which they suffered. For this they were naturally grateful to him, and included his name in the "Kaddish" prayer, an honor given only to the exilarch.

*12. Tell of Maimonides' appointment as royal physician.*

In 1171 the great, wise and chivalrous Saladin deposed the last of the Fatimid Caliphs, and henceforth reigned in Egypt, extending afterwards his rule to Syria and Palestine. Saladin treated the Jews of Egypt, as well as the Christians, with utmost toleration. He established colleges at Cairo and Alexandria, where courses of instruction were provided and free public lectures were given. The great library of 120,000 manuscripts, which had belonged to the Fatimid Caliph, was entrusted by Saladin to the care of his Vizier, Alfadhel, who was the real ruler of Egypt during Saladin's long absences abroad. Alfadhel, who was a most enlightened man, appointed Maimonides one of the royal physicians, and the great scholar ac-

quired a reputation in medicine as well as in Jewish matters.

*13. Tell of Maimonides' reputation as a physician.*

Maimonides wrote many medical works in Arabic, which enjoyed a wide reputation. They were largely based on the writings of Galen, the great medical authority of the Middle Ages. An Arabic poet wrote: "Galen's art heals only the body, but Maimonides cures both the body and the soul. With his wisdom he could heal the sickness of ignorance. If the moon would submit to his art, he would deliver her of her spots at the time of full moon." Maimonides was a practical doctor. His aim was the prevention rather than the cure of disease, and he also taught that the mind was often the root of bodily ailment. Maimonides' reputation as a doctor was so great that King Richard I of England, who fought in the Third Crusade against Saladin for the possession of Palestine, wanted to appoint him his private physician, but Maimonides refused the offer. A famous Bagdad doctor who visited Cairo said that he had come to Egypt mainly to see three men, one of whom was Maimonides.

*14. What was Maimonides' position in the Jewish communities of Egypt?*

By 1177 Maimonides was officially recognized as Rabbi of Cairo, and he formed a board of nine rabbis who, with him, administered the affairs of the community. Later he was appointed Nagid (prince) over the whole of the Egyptian Jews.



משה בן מימון ז"ל

*Traditional Portrait of Maimonides,  
with Autograph*



15. *What was Maimonides' position in world Jewry?*

Maimonides' works, as they appeared, increased his reputation, so that his authority became unique among the Jewish communities in all parts of the world. His learning and character gave him his commanding position in world-wide Jewry. He was called the "banner of the rabbis," the "enlightener of the eyes of Israel," and many other complimentary names. His admirers said of him: "From Moses (the Prophet) to Moses (Maimonides) there arose none like Moses (Maimonides)." His range of knowledge was amazing. It was said of him that he knew more of Christianity than most Christian priests, more of Islam than most Moslems, and he certainly knew more of Judaism than most Jews.

## XXIV

### MAIMONIDES' THIRTEEN PRINCIPLES OF JUDAISM

#### 1. *What is "The Light"?*

In 1168 Maimonides completed his famous commentary on the Mishnah, called *The Light* (in Hebrew, "Maor"; in Arabic, "Siraj"), which he wrote in Arabic. The earlier part of this work was written during his wanderings, under the difficulties of travel by land and sea, and it was completed after a period of ten years. It was the first successful attempt to present the laws of the Talmud in a clear and systematic manner, and Maimonides produced order and simplicity out of the confused mass of rabbinical decisions. *The Light* was not only a commentary on the text, but also a general survey of each theme as a whole. When the rabbis discussed some scientific subject, such as mathematics, astronomy, medicine, or weights and measures, Maimonides had an opportunity not only of displaying his own wealth of knowledge, but of showing that the rabbis had a vast fund of information on such questions.

#### 2. *What are Maimonides' thirteen principles of Judaism?*

Maimonides recognized that conduct must be based on certain beliefs. Therefore, in his *Light* he



formulated his famous Thirteen Principles of Judaism:

(1) The existence of a Creator.

God created the world out of nothing (*creatio ex nihilo*). He is also the constant Ruler of all created things. God alone is the only Being who demands no cause for His existence. All other things owe their existence to Him alone, in whose absence they would not exist. "He alone is the active cause of *all* things, whether past, present or future."

(2) The Unity of God.

The belief in One and only One God—monotheism. For if one God suffices, a second is superfluous. If one God is not sufficient, He cannot be perfect, and therefore cannot be divine. We not only proclaim God as One, refusing to recognize as divine any power besides Him, but also refrain from attributing to God anything that might directly or indirectly involve any notion contrary to the Unity of God. Therefore, God is One, simple and indivisible. This means that we must not understand the term One in the sense of a numerical unit, in which sense the term is used when applied to created beings. "The Creator is One, and there is no Oneness like His in any way."

[NOTE. The Unity of God is the principle which the Jews have always proclaimed by word of mouth, to which they have given expression throughout their literature, and for which they have willingly sacrificed their lives as martyrs. In spite of persecution and oppression, they have maintained their faith.]

(3) God has no body or form.

There are certain expressions in the Bible which

seem to convey to us the idea that God has a body and a form. They are called "anthropomorphic expressions." Maimonides says that the anthropomorphic expressions which are found in the Bible must not be taken literally, but as figures of speech. They are employed in order to illustrate the different acts of Divine Providence in such a way as to render them more intelligible to us human beings. We, human beings, consist of body and soul, and we produce an impression or exercise an influence on others by means of our body and by the activity of our bodily organs. If we desire to picture to ourselves or to others the fact that through Divine Providence something has been produced on earth, we must employ the same phrases which we use in describing human acts which cause a similar result. When we, therefore, speak of the House of God, we mean the house which we devote to our prayers, in which we feel the All-presence of God more than in any other place. The heaven is called the throne of God and the earth His footstool only to express the idea that the majesty of God is far beyond comparison with that of any ruler. We call God our Father and He calls us His children, because we love Him as we love our father, and He loves us as a father loves his children. In reality, God has no body or form. "There exists nothing which is in any way similar to Him."

(4) God is eternal.

As God is the cause of everything in existence, and requires no cause for His existence (Principle 1), and as it is impossible to separate the idea of existence from the idea of God (for the absence of God would cause the disappearance of everything), it follows therefore that God is always in existence, and that

neither beginning nor end can be fixed to His existence. God is eternal.

(5) Prayer is due to God alone.

After having declared our belief in God as the only Ruler of the universe, Who is One, has no body or form and is eternal, we proclaim Him as our Supreme Master, Who alone is capable of granting our requests. All existing things are under His control; all forces in nature only work at His Will and by His command. No other thing possesses the power and independence to fulfill our wishes. Prayer is, therefore, due to Him alone, not to the angels, the stars, the saints or departed souls.

(6) The truth of the words of the Prophets.

This principle declares our belief in the fact that God has communicated His Will to human beings, although we are incapable of forming a clear and definite idea of the manner in which such communication took place. Divine inspiration can only take place in men who distinguish themselves by great wisdom and moral strength; who are never overcome by any passion, but, on the contrary, overcome all passions; who possess wide and profound knowledge. The selection, however, of the individual for a prophet, as well as of the time, the place and object of God's communication, is dependent exclusively upon the Will of God.

(7) Moses was the greatest of all Prophets.

While other prophets chiefly addressed their own generation, blaming their brethren for disobedience to the divine law, threatening with punishments and comforting with blessings which they were to experience in the remote future, Moses addressed all times and all generations, communicating to them

laws "for all generations," "everlasting statutes," "the things which have been revealed for us and our children forever." He is therefore proclaimed by the Almighty as the greatest Prophet.

(8) The whole of our Law was given to Moses on Sinai.

By "the whole of our law" is to be understood that both the written law (the Pentateuch or the Torah) and the oral law (the Talmud) were given to Moses on Mount Sinai.

(9) The Law will not be changed.

It has been distinctly stated in the Torah that its precepts remain in force forever, without change, diminution, or addition. "The word which I command you that you must keep to do, thou shalt not add aught unto it nor take aught away from it" (Deut. xiii.1). "That which has been revealed for us and for our children forever is to do all the words of this law" (Ibid. xxix.28). Therefore, we see that a prophet cannot reveal any new law. If, therefore, any man, whether a Jew or non-Jew, should rise, perform signs and miracles, and say that the Lord sent him to add or abolish one of the divine precepts, or to interpret a precept in a way different from what has been handed down to us from Moses, or assert that the precepts which were given to the Jewish people had only temporary force and were not permanent laws—such a man is a false prophet, because he contradicts the prophecy of Moses. The mission of the prophets after Moses is to urge the people to obey the Law of Moses, and not to make a new religion.

(10) God knows the acts and thoughts of men.

The entire past and future lies unrolled before

God's eyes, and nothing is hidden from Him. "God," says Maimonides, "perceives future events before they happen, and His perception never fails. Therefore, no new ideas can present themselves to Him. He knows that a certain individual will be born at a certain time, will exist for a certain period, and will then cease to exist. The coming into existence of this individual is for God no new fact; nothing has happened that He was unaware of, for He knew this individual, such as he now is, before his birth." The question, then, has been raised: If God knows the acts and thoughts of men, does not the very fact of God's knowledge of the future act of man compel man to act in accordance with it? Is not man's free-will influenced by God's knowledge? To this Maimonides replies that God's knowledge of a thing is by no means the *cause* of its existence. God may in this respect be compared to a person who observes and notices the actions and conduct of his fellow-men, without interfering with them. It is the Will of God that man should have free-will and should be responsible for his actions, and His foresight does not necessarily include predetermination.

#### (11) Reward and Punishment.

The immediate reward and punishment for our conduct we receive in the pleasure and happiness we experience in doing something good, and in the grief and remorse we ought to feel on learning that we have displeased God by our conduct. As our sages say: "The reward of a good act is the good act itself, and the punishment of an evil act is the evil act itself." It is, however, emphatically declared in the Talmud that the reward of good deeds is given to the righteous in

the future world. Maimonides opposes the idea embodied in Mohammed's teaching that the future world will be a Garden of Eden, with rivers of wine and beautiful houses where men will recline on silken couches and enjoy earthly pleasures. Nor does he accept the view of a Hell with burning fires and tortures. Such ideas in the Bible or Talmud, says Maimonides, must not be taken literally, but as figures of speech. As the life of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden was free from care and trouble; and such a life was the ideal of human hopes and wishes, the Garden of Eden (or Paradise), therefore, became the symbol of man's perfect happiness. On the other hand, the valley of Hinnom (near Jerusalem) was a place of horror and disgust; a place where at one time children were burnt to idols, and where later the refuse of the city was cast. Dwelling in the valley of Hinnom (Gehinnom), therefore, became the symbol of the punishment to be inflicted on the wicked. Thus, Garden of Eden or Paradise and Gehinnom or Hell are merely figures of speech to express our idea of the existence of a future reward and punishment, and must not be taken literally as names of certain places.

Children, says Maimonides, might be enticed in their lessons with sweets and pretty clothes, and older students with presents of money and even the hope of securing important positions, or they might be frightened by threats of punishments. But men of character must seek wisdom and truth for their own sake, and not with the hope of any reward or in order to escape punishment. So Maimonides preaches the Jewish view that a man must do good and avoid evil because he is

a man and owes it to his manhood to perfect himself. He must serve God, not in order to win the future world, but for love of the Almighty. If he does this, his efforts toward righteousness will enable his soul to live in that state which befits it, *i. e.* in the world to come, in a state of perfect happiness and bliss, which is beyond human comprehension and imagination. "Heavenly pleasures," says Maimonides, "can be neither measured nor comprehended by a mortal being, any more than the blind can distinguish colors or the deaf appreciate music."

(12) Coming of the Messiah.

Maimonides says as follows: "The King Messiah will in some future time come, restore the Kingdom of David to its former power, build the Temple, bring together scattered Israel, and all the ancient laws will again be in force. Sacrifices will be offered, and 'years of release' and jubilees will be kept as prescribed in the Law.<sup>1</sup> Whoever does not believe in him, or does not hope for his coming, shows a want of faith not only in the prophets, but also in the Law.

<sup>1</sup> Every seventh year is called "the year of release," during which the land in Palestine, while the Temple was in existence, was to lie fallow; one shall neither sow nor reap; it includes also the annulment of all monetary obligations between Israelites, the creditor being legally barred from making any attempt to collect his debt (Lev. xxv.2-7; Deut. xv. 1-6). The fiftieth year, *i. e.* the year following the last year of the seven "years of release," is called "the jubilee year," during which the land regulation of "the year of release" is to be observed; it includes also the return of properties to the original owner, and the emancipation of all Jewish servants (Lev. xxv.8-14; 39-42).

"You must not imagine that Messiah must prove his Messianity by signs and miracles, doing something unexpected, bringing the dead to life, or similar things. The principal thing is this: the statutes and precepts of our Torah remain forever, and nothing can be added to them nor aught taken from them. If, therefore, a descendant of David earnestly studies the law, observes, like David, his father, what the law, both the written and the oral, commands, causes all Israelites to act similarly, exhorts those who are lax in the performance of the commandments, and fights the wars of the Lord—he may possibly be Messiah. If he succeeds, builds the Temple in its place, and gathers scattered Israel, he is certainly Messiah. If he does not succeed or is killed in war, it is certain that he is not the Messiah promised in the law; he is like all the noble and good kings of the House of David who have died. Also Jesus, who imagined that he would be Messiah, was not the Messiah promised to Israel. All the prophets said that Messiah will be a redeemer and a saviour to the Israelites, will bring them together from their dispersion, and will strengthen their obedience to the divine precepts, but Jesus caused destruction by the sword to Israel; he changed the law, and misled many people to worship a being besides God.

"Do not imagine that in the days of Messiah the course of nature will be changed in any way, or that any new creation will take place. When Isaiah said: "The wolf will dwell with the lamb, and the leopard will lie down with the kid" (Isaiah xv.6), he merely employed allegorical and figurative speech. He meant to say that the Jew will dwell in safety together with



his enemy, who has been as cruel to him as wolves and leopards; all will join the true religion; they will not rob, nor commit any violence. Our sages said that there will be no other difference between the present time and the days of Messiah but the independence of the people of Israel. Messiah himself will also die and his son will succeed him as the King of Israel, and so on."

(13) Resurrection of the dead.

Opinions differ as to whether Maimonides implied here only immortality of the soul or also revival of the body. The accepted opinion of Orthodox Jewry is that this principle implies also the revival of the body. There is no doubt that the Almighty produces fresh life from death. We need only observe the action of nature in the world around us to convince us that "God gives life to things dead." But how this will be done in reference to our own selves, whether we shall enjoy the same life, or our future life will be different, whether *all* or only the righteous will be restored to life—these and similar questions are beyond human knowledge to answer; in fact, nobody knows.

*3. What was the attitude of Jewry toward Maimonides' Thirteen Principles?*

Maimonides' *Thirteen Principles of Faith* were accepted by most of the Jews of that time without question, although afterwards there was some discussion as to the wisdom of formulating any principles of faith or dogmas at all. They are still, however, recognized as the Jewish creed by Orthodox Jewry throughout the world. Maimonides expressed the view that any Jew who rejected any of these principles could not be

regarded as belonging to the Jewish fold. But this test was never rigidly applied, and he himself strongly urged the desirability of freedom of thought. The *Thirteen Principles* were soon made the theme of religious poems and one of them, "Yigdal," has a prominent place in the Synagogue service.

## MAIMONIDES' CODE OF LAW

*1. What was Maimonides' second great work?*

Maimonides' second great work was his code of Jewish laws (completed in 1180), which was called *Mishnah Torah* (The Second Law, the Hebrew name for Deuteronomy) and *Yad Hachazakah* (The Mighty Hand, the term applied to Moses in Deuteronomy, in the last verse of the Pentateuch).

*2. What was the purpose of this Code?*

The purpose of this gigantic work, consisting of fourteen books and one thousand chapters, was to provide a complete code and digest of all the laws contained in the Bible, Talmud and rabbinical writings. The Talmud has been compared to a maze, in which it is difficult to find a way. But this code was like a clearly designed building, with its halls and rooms, through which a stranger might easily pass without a guide. Maimonides gives in his code in brief, clear form the decisions of the rabbis of the Talmud, the regulations of the gaonim and a summary of Jewish religious beliefs and moral teachings. He wrote it in a clear and pure Hebrew.

3. *What is the introduction to Maimonides' Code?*

The laws of Moses, the law-giver, number, according to tradition, 613 (248 positive commands and 365 negative commands). Maimonides set out these commandments in his *Sefer ha-Mitzvot* (Book of Commandments), which formed an introduction to his code—the *Mishneh Torah*.

4. *What mental qualities enabled Maimonides to compile his Code?*

Maimonides possessed a thoroughly logical and systematic mind, which had the power of grouping and arranging the greatest and smallest things. He was a sworn enemy of disorder and chaotic confusion. In this respect he may justly be called the Jewish Aristotle. His mental make-up always strove for clearness, method and system. Only so clear and systematic a thinker as Maimonides could have compiled such a gigantic work, which enables the Jew to know all the laws and truths of Judaism in a clear and simplified way.

## THE GUIDE TO THE PERPLEXED

1. *What is Maimonides' most famous work?*

Maimonides' most famous work is his philosophical book, *The Guide to the Perplexed* (in Hebrew *Moreh Nebuchim*) which he completed in 1190. It was written in Arabic in Hebrew characters. This philosophical treatise was originally compiled for his favorite pupil, Joseph Aknin. Whereas his other works had been written for the mass of Jews, this was intended for the few thinkers who understood philosophy. It had, however, a greater influence than any of his writings, not merely among Jews, but also in the general world of thought. It soon became known outside Jewish circles, and it was much studied by Moslems and Christians, even while Maimonides was still living.

2. *What was the purpose of the "Guide to the Perplexed"?*

The purpose of Maimonides' *Guide* was to justify his religious beliefs in the light of reason and logic; to show that his strong faith in Judaism was not inconsistent with his equally sincere trust in reason. "I have composed this work," said Maimonides, "neither for the common people, nor for beginners, nor for those who occupy themselves only with the law as it is handed down without concerning themselves with

its principles. The design of this work is rather to promote the true understanding of the real spirit of the law, to guide those religious persons who, adhering to the Torah, have studied philosophy and are embarrassed by the contradictions between the teachings of philosophy and the literal sense of the Torah." It was, then, a reconciliation between religion and philosophy, between faith and reason. There was nothing, Maimonides contended, in the Bible which, if properly explained, contradicted true philosophy.

*3. What were Maimonides' principles that guided his life?*

Maimonides kept before himself three guiding principles which actuated his whole life and teaching—love for his religion, faith in God and a keen desire to find the truth in all things. Maimonides became absorbed in the teaching of the Greek philosopher, Aristotle, for whom he had great admiration, and he has been justly called the Jewish Aristotle. He sought to apply the principles of the famous philosopher's teaching to his understanding of religion. Faith and reason were to go hand in hand. In his eyes, the ancient religion of his fathers would be immensely strengthened if it could be shown that it was justified by reason. He resolved, therefore, to teach the truth, as he saw it, to his brethren.

*4. What were the truths which Maimonides taught in his "Guide"?*

(1) God.

Review the Principles 1, 2, 3, 4, 10, in Chapter XXIV, Maimonides' *Thirteen Principles of Judaism*.

## (2) Good and Evil.

Maimonides emphasized the Jewish view that freedom of will is granted to every man; the power of doing good or evil is in our own hands. Since God, the Creator of the world, is perfect and All-good, the world cannot have been otherwise than good. Evils are often inflicted on men by themselves, yet they attribute the result to God. But "from on high there comes no evil." When, therefore, evils are mentioned in the Bible as sent by God, the Biblical expressions must be explained allegorically. Indeed, says Maimonides, all existing evils are created by men themselves, with the exception of some which have their origin in the laws of production and destruction, and which are rather an expression of God's mercy, since by them the species are perpetuated. It befits us, therefore, to turn in penitence to God and forsake our evil deeds.

## (3) Miracles.

Miracles, says Maimonides, are certainly not impossible. The same Creator who established the laws of nature can also suspend them, but He does so only temporarily, that the old order may soon return. The waters of the Nile were changed into blood only for a short time, and the Red Sea divided itself for the Israelites but for a few hours. In his view, the Creator implanted the powers of miracles in nature, so that in reality God did not effect any change after creation. There are, however, very few miracles in the Bible, for miracles cannot prove that which is impossible. Maimonides declares that the belief in Moses and his law was based on the actual revelation of God on Mount Sinai and by no means on the miracles performed. Since miracles may be the work of witch-

craft and of other non-divine agencies, they cannot be accepted as proof. Stories of the prophets, in which they spoke of ascending to heaven, were visions of the imagination. Neither Moses the law-giver, nor Elijah the prophet ever ascended to heaven, our rabbis in the Talmud say.

(4) Prophecy.

Review the Principles 6 and 7 in chapter *Thirteen Principles of Judaism*.

(5) Sacrifices.

Sacrifices, says Maimonides, were the continuance of ancient customs. It was, therefore, the wisdom of God not to order their discontinuance, because it was the nature of man to continue doing things to which he had been accustomed. It was, he argues, as if a prophet commanded us not to pray to God or seek His help in times of trouble. We certainly should be disinclined to follow him.

(6) The Purpose of the Commandments.

The laws and commandments of the Torah were given for the purpose of purifying, beautifying, sanctifying and exalting man's life. The Torah was a guide to righteous conduct in life and promoted a proper attitude toward God. For instance, whatever the origin of the dietary laws, they became, in the Torah, part of the laws of holiness, which purified both the body and the soul. They were intended as a training in self-mastery, in curbing our natural desires. The wearing of the "Tephillin" was intended to make man humble and God-fearing, to lead the wearer to banish idle thoughts, and to induce him to turn to words of truth and righteousness. In the same way, the blowing of the Shofar on New Year summoned the worshipper to



ponder on his actions, to remember his Creator, and to turn to Him in penitence.

(7) Object of Creation.

Man is the object of the creation of the world, and his happiness is the ultimate aim of the divine laws. In order that man should be considered the aim and end of the creation, he must be perfect morally and intellectually. Maimonides, therefore, taught that the laws of the Torah were not meant as a burden on mankind, "but as mercy, loving-kindness and peace," as a means by which man might "imitate the ways of God." Both the practices commanded by, and the truths taught in, the Torah assist men to acquire a real understanding and love of God.

(8) Man's obligations to himself and his fellow-men.

Man is obligated to keep himself in health by regular living, by seeking medical advice in sickness, by cleanliness, by earning a livelihood, and so on. The conditions essential to the soundness of the soul are contentment and moderation in joy and grief. Pity is a generous quality of the soul. To develop this sentiment the Torah prohibited cruelty to animals. Mutual love and sociability are necessary to men. The sentiment of justice consists in respecting the property and honor of others, even though they be one's slaves.

*5. State some general teachings of Maimonides.*

(1) Life.

Maimonides strongly condemned the life of a hermit. "He who habitually shows moderation at his meals," he said, "is more praiseworthy than the occasional faster."

## (2) Fate.

Maimonides drew a sharp line between astronomy (the study of the stars from a purely scientific point of view) and astrology (the study of the stars so as to gain knowledge of events that would occur in the future). He said that works on astrology were the product of fools, who mistook vanity for wisdom. He ridiculed the idea that the fate of man could be dependent on the position of the stars, which would rob life of its purpose and make man a slave of destiny. It was true, that, here and there in Jewish literature, a rabbi might be found to express some such belief, but no one was justified in surrendering his own opinion because a sage had erred or because a remark intended as a figure of speech was expressed literally. "A man must never cast his own judgment behind him; the eyes are set in the front, not in the back."

## (3) Prayer.

Maimonides condemned the worshipper who prays merely with his lips while he is thinking of his business, or recites the Torah with his tongue while his heart is occupied with such things as the building of a house. "A prayer without devotion is no prayer," he said.

## (4) Gambling.

Maimonides was opposed to playing games for money. "At gambling," he said, "the player always loses. Though he may win money, he weaves a spider's web round himself."

*6. Describe Maimonides' character.*

(1) Maimonides was modest. Occasionally a rabbi would write to him respectfully pointing out

some slip in one of his books. He would reply, readily admitting the oversight, thanking his correspondent for pointing it out to him, and imploring him to examine his work with the closest attention. (2) Maimonides was a lover of peace. He used his influence to promote harmony among the Jewish people. "We hear too much of unions in Israel, let us hear more of *union*," he said. A worshipper had embroidered texts on his "Tallith" (scarf used at prayer) and to this the local rabbi objected. Maimonides, always desirous of promoting peace, said to the worshipper: "As thou didst serve God in making the 'Tallith,' so serve God in discarding it, and prevent dispute." To the rabbi he said: "A rabbi should rule with a gentle hand and should not interfere unnecessarily." (3) Maimonides was tolerant. He expressed the view that the Moslems were not idolaters, for they recognized the unity of God. A Jewish scholar called a Moslem convert to Judaism a fool because he denied that Moslems were idolaters. Maimonides wrote to the convert that the scholar had sinned grievously and should ask his pardon, for the scholar had forgotten the thirty-three references in the Torah to strangers. "Even if he had been right and thou in error," Maimonides said, "it was his duty to be gentle; how much more, when thou hadst the truth and he erred." Maimonides' tolerance to other religions is also illustrated in the following statement of his: "The teachings of Jesus and of Mohammed, who arose after him, tend to bring to perfection all mankind, so that they may serve God with one consent. For the whole world is now full of the words of the Bible and its commandments."

## XXVII

### OPPOSITION TO MAIMONIDES

#### *1. Who was Maimonides' petty opponent?*

Maimonides was no exception to the rule that all great men have had their enemies, for envy is one of the failings of human nature. He did not escape the attack of petty opponents, who were jealous of his greatness. One of these opponents was Samuel ben Ali, who was gaon of Bagdad. He was a very vain man, who surrounded himself with all kinds of luxury, and was very jealous of the reputation which Maimonides had acquired, even among the congregations in Arabia and Persia, over which the gaon exercised authority. So Samuel and his followers spread slander about the great scholar, and strongly criticized his works.

#### *2. What was Maimonides' attitude toward Samuel?*

In face of all opposition, Maimonides displayed no irritation, and showed that he could afford to ignore such petty attacks. "Honor bids me," he said, "to avoid fools, not to conquer them. It is better for me to spend my efforts in teaching those fitted to learn than to waste my time in winning a victory over the unfit." When, however, Samuel wrote Maimonides a

letter, pointing out some supposed error in one of his writings and sarcastically remarking that he should not fret about it, Maimonides sent a spirited reply, in which he pointed out that it was Samuel himself who had erred in his understanding of the Talmud, and added: "You seem to think I am sensitive to every word of blame. You make a mistake. God has protected me against this weakness."

### 3. *Who was Maimonides' favorite pupil?*

Joseph Aknin, who came from Fez to learn from the great teacher, was Maimonides' favorite pupil. He went to Bagdad, where he warmly defended his teacher against Samuel ben Ali's attacks. Maimonides, however, showed the generosity of his nature by advising Aknin not to humiliate his opponent. "Remember," he said, "that you have injured this man, that his income is at stake. Leave him to his trivialities, for what does he know of the soul and of philosophy? You will please me better by actively teaching men what is true than by setting yourself up as my champion against the untrue. Teach, do not quarrel."

### 4. *Who was Maimonides' honorable opponent?*

Maimonides had also an honorable opponent in the person of Rabbi Abraham ben David of Posquies in the south of France, commonly called "Rabad," from the initials of his name (born 1125 and died 1198). He wrote strictures (*hassagoth*) on Maimonides' *Code of Law*, pointing out what in his opinion were errors made by Maimonides in his code.

5. *Who was Abraham ben David?*

Abraham ben David of Posquires was the most outstanding Talmudist of the twelfth century. He was wealthy and charitable, maintained a college at his own expense and supported poor students. Abraham was an active teacher and an author of numerous works, which included a commentary on the whole Talmud, several compendiums of rabbinical laws, a treatise on the Jewish laws relating to women, and hundreds of answers to questions submitted to him. As a critical commentator on the Talmud, he has been regarded in the front rank of Jewish scholars. He was also a man of noble character. When Abraham died, the "Cohenim" (priests), although not allowed to enter a cemetery, made his grave, as it was held that before such a great man, the priestly family should sink its sacred character.

6. *What were the accusations Abraham ben David made against Maimonides' Code?*

Besides the strictures which Abraham wrote on the code, he also made the following accusations:

(1) He accused Maimonides of writing a new Talmud and causing the neglect of the original Talmud. Maimonides, however, pointed out that he wrote his code for the ordinary man as well as for the expert.

(2) He blamed Maimonides for not quoting his authorities for each law in his code. Maimonides defended himself by saying: "I have not invented this explanation, or myself framed these assertions, but I have taken them from the words of the wise and gathered them from the works of others. Though I do not

name them, I do not claim by my silence the learning of others as my own."

(3) Another complaint was that he did not write his code in the Aramaic idiom of the Talmud. Maimonides replied that this was too difficult for the ordinary man to understand. He chose instead the Hebrew of the Mishnah. His desire was to provide in the simplest, briefest form, a code of Jewish law for all Jews, and not only for scholars. "If I could summarize the Talmud into one chapter," said Maimonides, "I would not use two for the purpose."

#### *7. Tell of Maimonides' death.*

Maimonides died at the age of seventy years in 1204, and was buried at Tiberias in Palestine. His death was received with widespread grief throughout the world. In Cairo both Jews and Moslems publicly mourned his loss for three days. The congregation of Jerusalem proclaimed a general fast and held a special funeral service for him. The chapter containing the penalties for breaking God's commandments was read from the Torah, and from the prophets the story of the capture of the Ark of the Covenant by the Philistines, concluding with the words: "The glory is departed from Israel, for the Ark of God is taken" (1 Samuel iv.22).

#### *8. State the characteristic qualities of Maimonides.*

Maimonides was at once a painstaking codifier; an expert lawyer, formulating clearly some involved legal points; a picturesque historian, giving masterly sketches of the origin of some custom or law; a learned scientist, writing original essays on astronomy and

other scientific subjects; a profound philosopher, discussing morals, the attributes of God and the deeper problems of life; and above all he was an ardent believer in God. Maimonides commences his *Code of Law* with the words: [“The foundation of all foundations and the pillar of all wisdom is the recognition that an original Being exists, Who called all creatures into existence.”]

9. *Tell of Maimonides' influence.*

Maimonides' name rang throughout the world. The most learned men of his time subordinated themselves to his judgment, and requested his instruction in the most humble manner. He was regarded in his time as chief authority for the whole Jewish world, which revered him as its noblest representative. Maimonides is still recognized by Orthodox Jewry throughout the world as the leading authority on the principles of Judaism and Jewish law. The saying “From Moses (the law-giver) unto Moses (Maimonides) there arose none like Moses (Maimonides)” still holds true.

10. *Who was Abraham Maimonides?*

Maimonides left only one son, Abraham, who was born in 1185 and died in 1255. Abraham inherited from his great father the same deep sense of religion, the same peace-loving character, and he was also Nagid (prince) of the Egyptian Jews and Court physician of the Sultan. He was a Talmudic scholar and a student of philosophy. Yet he did not approach his father in energy and intellect.



*11. What was Maimonides' "Ethical Will"?*

Maimonides left his son Abraham a will containing valuable counsel. In his ethical will, Maimonides advised his son as follows:

Always be found with respectable and learned men, and listen to their words. Be not proud and haughty in their presence, and be not ashamed to inquire anything of which you are ignorant.

Learn in your youth, when your heart is still fresh and not yet burdened with cares, and before your memory is weakened.

Serve God with love; fear only prevents sin, but love induces to do good.

Love truth and uprightness and cleave to them; prosperity so gained is built on a sure rock. Keep firmly to your word; let not a legal contract or witness be more binding than your verbal promise, whether in public or private. Disdain tricks, evasions and sham practices. Woe to him who builds his house upon them.

Despise inactivity and idleness, the causes of destruction of the body, of poverty, of self-contempt.

Defile not your soul by quarrelsomeness. Families were driven into exile, princes deposed from their positions, great cities laid in ruins, colleges closed, the pious humiliated and the honored despised—all on account of quarrelsomeness.

Be meek and humble, for they are the steps of the ladder by which you may climb the highest hill of virtue.

Keep a bridle on your tongue and a muzzle on your mouth, for it is improper to speak wickedness, false-

hood, slander and nonsense, when God has made man superior to the animals by bestowing the ability to thank and praise Him.

Accustom yourself to good habits, for a man's character is what habit makes it.

If you find in the law or prophets or the sages a hard saying which you cannot understand, stand fast by your faith and attribute the fault to your own want of understanding.

## XXVIII

### MAIMONISTS AND ANTI-MAIMONISTS

*1. Who was the worthy successor to Maimonides?*

Although Maimonides' son, Abraham, was a Talmudic scholar and student of philosophy, and inherited his father's character, his mildness, his sincere piety, his medical knowledge, his place as physician at the Court of the Sultan and his position as chief of the Egyptian Jews—yet Abraham did not approach his father in energy and intellect. Nor was there at that time any other personality in Jewry who could exercise the same authority as Maimonides did.

*2. What was the immediate effect of Maimonides' death?*

Maimonides' death not only produced a gap and a standstill in the spiritual aspirations of the Jews, but deprived them of a dignified and mighty leader, who had been able to bring together under one standard a people scattered all over the world.

*3. What was the result of this situation?*

With no commanding figure to lead them, the Jews became divided into two hostile camps—those who followed Maimonides, and those who opposed his teaching. During the lifetime of Maimonides there

was, as we have seen, a certain amount of opposition to his teachings. But he so towered above all other Jews of his day in learning and ability, and was so respected for his great personal qualities, that his opponents did not have much influence while he still lived. After his death, however, the Jews of the world were left without any great leader, and hence became divided into two parties. The two parties were called Maimonists and anti-Maimonists.

*4. Why did the anti-Maimonists oppose Maimonides' teaching?*

Maimonides' aim to reconcile religion with philosophy, faith with reason, seemed to the anti-Maimonists to be against the Biblical and Talmudic teachings. Maimonides' ideas embodied in the *Thirteen Principles of Judaism*, namely, his views of God (that He has no body or form), of miracles (that Israel's religion and Torah are not based upon miracles and that miracles cannot prove that which is impossible), of prophecy (refusing to believe it to be a direct communication with God, but as dream-phenomena), of immortality of the soul (they thought he denied resurrection of the body), of reward and punishment (that there exists not a paradise or hell in the ordinary sense of the word)—all these and similar views of Maimonides the anti-Maimonists believed undermine and destroy traditional Judaism. Then, too, Maimonides' method of explaining many ceremonial laws especially provoked opposition, because, if accepted, these laws would lose their permanent value and have only temporary importance.

5. *Who was the leader of the anti-Maimonist party?*

The leader of the anti-Maimonists was Solomon ben Abraham of Montpellier, in the province of Provence in the south of France. Solomon was a pious, honorable man and learned in the Talmud; his whole life was wrapped up in the Talmud. Not being a student of philosophy, and therefore not able to grasp Maimonides' views, in his eyes almost every word of Maimonides' writings was un-Jewish.

6. *What were Solomon's views?*

Solomon and his followers, the anti-Maimonists, believed that God had eyes, ears and other human organs, sitting in heaven upon a throne, surrounded by darkness and clouds while Maimonides declared that "whoever believes that God has a body or form is a heretic." They were convinced of the existence of a paradise and hell, *i. e.*, the righteous were to enjoy in the heavenly Garden of Eden the flesh of the leviathan and the old wine, stored up from the beginning of the world in celestial flasks, while the godless, the heretics and transgressors of the law were to be scourged, tortured and burnt in the hell-fire of "Gehinnom" (Hell). Adopting these and similar views Solomon and his followers could not help finding almost every word in Maimonides' writings un-Jewish and heretical.

7. *What weapons did Solomon use in opposing the Maimonists?*

Borrowing the idea from the Church, Solomon proposed to excommunicate the Maimonists. To appear, however, single-handed against the Maimonists,

whose number was large, and who ruled public opinion, could but ruin his cause. He, therefore, appealed to the rabbis in southern France, but could not find a single rabbi who was ready to take part in the excommunication of the Maimonists. The only rabbis in the south of France whom he could persuade to agree with him were his two pupils, Jonah ben Abraham Gerondi and David ben Saul. These three pronounced the ban in 1232 against all the Jews who read Maimonides' works and studied anything except the Bible and the Talmud.

*8. What was the answer of the Maimonist party?*

There was much indignation among the Jews at the audacity of Solomon and his pupils, and consequently Solomon and his two pupils were themselves excommunicated.

*9. What was Solomon's next step in opposing the Maimonists?*

Forsaken by most of the rabbis of France, Solomon now took a treacherous step, which has caused his name to be remembered with disgust. Pope Gregory IX had established the Inquisition (1233) to deal with Christians, who had broken away from the Church of Rome. Fanatical monks were seizing Christian heretics and burning them. Solomon and Jonah Gerondi now turned to these monks, whose hands were stained with the blood of countless victims, and said to them: "You burn your heretics, persecute also ours." Maimonides' works, accordingly, were seized in Montpellier and Paris, and were publicly burnt in 1234.

10. *What was Jewry's attitude toward Solomon's act?*

Solomon's act naturally excited the horror of all Jews, and caused the greatest indignation in both France and Spain. Solomon and his followers were generally condemned. That Christian monks, who hated and persecuted the Jews, should have been asked to assist in the matter was rightly regarded as the most outrageous treachery to the Jewish people. Turning for aid to the fanatical monks, Solomon crossed the line of conscientious opposition and became an unintentional traitor. Solomon defeated his own ends by this action, and he and his followers were severely punished.

11. *Who was the leader of the Maimonist party?*

The leader of the Maimonists was David Kimchi (1160–1235), the great grammarian and Bible commentator, who, although an old man, journeyed to Spain from France to take part in opposing the anti-Maimonists.

12. *What was the situation in Spain?*

The quarrel spread to Spain, where there were violent discussions between the Maimonists and anti-Maimonists. In Aragon were to be found the most vigorous Maimonists in Spain, and the principal congregations excommunicated Solomon of Montpellier and his pupils. At Toledo, the largest Jewish community in Spain, the most active anti-Maimonists were Rabbi Meir Abulafia and Judah Alfakar, physician to King Ferdinand III and the most influential Jew in Castile,

## MEIR ABULAFIA

1180-1244

*13. Who was Meir Abulafia?*

Meir Abulafia, an intellectual and learned man of Toledo, had already objected to the views of Maimonides during the great teacher's lifetime, and expressed his objections in a letter to the "wise men of Lunel." Although Meir was a descendant of a highly respectable family, and enjoyed considerable authority, his letter made little impression. He was a man of extreme arrogance—a quality unfavorable to winning followers. The learned Aaron ben Meshulam of Lunel, who was master of the sciences and the Talmud, and a warm admirer of Maimonides, attacked Meir for his audacity in passing an opinion on Maimonides, "the greatest man of the time." Sheshet Benveniste, who was a philosopher, doctor, diplomat, poet, Talmudic scholar and employed as ambassador by King Alfonso II, composed a sarcastic epigram upon Meir:

You ask me, friends, why this man's name,  
Seeing he walks in darkness, should be Meir (light),  
I answer, the Sages have called the night "light,"  
This, too, is an example of the rule of contraries.

*14. What was the situation in Palestine?*

A learned Talmudist, Daniel ben Saadiah, who lived in Damascus, was a bitter opponent of Maimonides' teaching. In a work he bitterly attacked Maimonides, and sought to prove that the great teacher was a heretic. Indignant at these attacks, the Mai-



monists and especially Joseph Aknin, the favorite pupil of Maimonides, urged Abraham Maimonides to excommunicate Daniel. Abraham, however, refused to comply with their request, saying that he did not think it right to excommunicate Daniel, whom he considered a pious man, and who had only made a mistake; moreover, he did not feel justified in interfering in a matter which was to some extent personal. The Maimonists and Joseph Aknin, however, persuaded the Exilarch David to agree with them. Daniel was, accordingly, excommunicated and died of grief, and all opposition to Maimonides in the East died down for a long time.

### MOSES OF COUCY 1200–1260

#### *15. Who was Moses of Coucy?*

A French Rabbi named Moses of Coucy (1200–1260), one of the youngest tosafists, a man of great piety and gentle disposition, and an admirer of Maimonides, proposed to spread the truth of Judaism in a more peaceful way. Noting the success of the monks, who travelled from village to village preaching to the people, Moses adopted the same method. He went from one congregation to another in southern France and Spain delivering sermons on the Jewish religion. He was, therefore, called “the preacher.” He caused many Jews who had fallen away from the practice of Jewish observances to renew them, and, by laying stress on the importance of peace and friendliness, did much to soften the strife which had divided the communities.

16. *State some of the fine teachings of Moses of Coucy.*

It is because man is half angel, half brute, that his inner life witnesses such bitter war between such unlike natures. The brute in him clamors for animal pleasures and things, in which there is only vanity; but the angel resists, and strives to make him know that meat, drink and sleep are but means whereby the body may be made fit for the study of the truth, and the doing of the will of God. Man will do well to say aloud each day, as he rises: "This day I will be a faithful servant of the Almighty. I will be on my guard against wrath, falsehood, hatred and quarrelsomeness, and will forgive those who harm me." For he who forgives is forgiven in his turn; a hard heart and a temper that will not make up quarrels are a heavy burden of sin, and unworthy of an Israelite.

17. *State some of the important works of Moses of Coucy.*

Moses of Coucy is the author of a commentary on the Talmud "Yoma," entitled *Tosafoth Yeshanim* (old tosafoth), and is printed in the Talmud editions. The commentary is distinguished for its brevity and clearness. He is also the author of a work called *Sefer Mitzvoth ha-Godol*, usually known as "Semag," from the initials of its name, and deals with the 365 negative and 248 positive commands of the Torah, separately explaining each of them according to the Talmudic tradition and decisions of the rabbis. The "Semag" is written with much clearness and is a rich source for the history of codification, as it quotes numerous rabbinical authors and works of the past. It aroused much enthusiasm when it first became

known, and has always been held in high respect, as is shown by the great number of its editions, commentaries and compilations.

*18. Who renewed the strife between the Maimonists and anti-Maimonists in Palestine?*

Solomon Petit, a French rabbi who settled in Acre in Palestine, secured the support of German rabbis against Maimonides' writings. At this time Maimonides' tomb at Tiberias had been desecrated, and the inscription on it was changed to read: "Moses Maimuni, the excommunicated heretic." This caused indignation at Acre and elsewhere.

*19. What was the attitude of the Maimonists?*

David, the grandson of Maimonides, who was then Nagid (prince) of the Egyptian Jews, called upon all the congregations of Palestine to defend the honor of his grandfather. He received the support of the rabbis of Babylonia, Damascus and Safed, and a ban of excommunication was passed in 1289 against Solomon Petit and any person who spoke of Maimonides in terms of disrespect. The German rabbis were then too much occupied with their own troubles to continue the contest, and in Spain also the dispute died down. Thus, the Maimonists triumphed.

*20. Tell of another cause that led to the triumph of the Maimonists.*

In 1242 an attack was made on the Talmud by the fanatical monks, and twenty-four carloads of the Talmud were brought together in one spot in Paris and burnt. Jonah Gerondi, who but a short time be-

fore had given Maimonides' works to the monks in Paris to be thrown in the flames, soon became aware of the bitter hatred of the monks to the Talmud. He saw in the burning of the Talmud a divine punishment for his having permitted the writings of Maimonides to be burnt. Overwhelmed by the sense of his injustice, he publicly in the synagogues confessed his sincere repentance, and announced his intention of making a pilgrimage to the grave of Maimonides to beg the pardon of this great and pious teacher. He left Paris and stopped at Montpellier, where he made a public confession. On the way, however, he died. This act did more than anything else to reconcile the opposing parties, which henceforth treated each other as brethren.

*21. Whose views were accepted by Jewry?*

For the time being, the defenders of Maimonides triumphed. Later on the quarrel broke out again with even greater bitterness, but henceforth Maimonides' position was unrivalled. Maimonides' views were accepted by Jewry throughout the world; and whereas he was once regarded as a heretic, he is now recognized by Orthodox Jewry as the leading authority on the principles of Judaism and Jewish law. "From Moses (the law-giver) to Moses (Maimonides) there arose none like Moses (Maimonides)."

## XXIX

### NACHMANIDES

1194–1270

*1. Tell of the early life of Nachmanides.*

Moses ben Nachman Gerondi (in Hebrew books he is usually called “Ramban” from the initials of his name, but the name by which he is now known is Nachmanides) was born in 1194 at Gerona in the province of Catalonia in the north of Spain (whence he derived his name “Gerondi”). He was also given the Spanish name of Bonastruc de Portas. Like Maimonides, he followed the occupation of a doctor. When he was only sixteen years old, Nachmanides wrote supplements to the code of Isaac Alfasi. Very early in his life he was recognized as a great teacher and rabbi, first at Gerona, and then at Barcelona, where he became Chief Rabbi of Catalonia. Nachmanides was the greatest rabbi in the period which followed the death of Maimonides.

*2. What was Nachmanides' social position?*

Nachmanides was a man of means, and was held in high favor by King James I of Aragon. His brother, Benveniste de Portas, was also in favor at the

royal court, and acted as tax-collector for several towns in Aragon.

*3. Describe the mental make-up of Nachmanides.*

Nachmanides' mental make-up seems to have been affected by conflicting influences. From Spain, where he was born, he drew an interest in the wider culture which existed there. From the French rabbis, he derived a love for the Talmud. "They are our own masters," he said, "and to them we must go for instruction." He was, however, also aware of the dangers of their narrow methods. "They try to force an elephant through the eye of a needle," he remarked on one occasion. He respected the older authorities. "Only he who occupies with the teachings of the sages will drink pure old wine," he said. Yet, if he disagreed with the view of a gaon or later rabbi, he frankly stated his opinion. Thus, he always remained independent in his views.

*4. What was Nachmanides' attitude toward Maimonides' teachings?*

Midway between the Maimonists and anti-Maimonists was Nachmanides. He did not accept all the opinions of Maimonides, but would not agree to wholesale condemnation of scientific knowledge. He was very indignant with the French rabbis, who bitterly attacked the writings of Maimonides, and he vigorously defended him for his great service to the Jewish people. So Nachmanides tried to effect a compromise, by which some of Maimonides' works—*The Code of Law*—should be accepted, and others—*The*

*Guide to the Perplexed*—rejected. He failed, however, in his effort.

5. *State the contrast between Maimonides' view and that of Nachmanides.*

Maimonides justified his religion in the light of reason and drew inspiration from the Greek philosophers. On the other hand, Nachmanides accepted Judaism as beyond discussion, and rejected the teaching of Aristotle. To him Judaism was a religion, not of the intellect but of the emotions. Nachmanides explained that Maimonides wrote for the few who understood and had been influenced by Greek philosophy. Maimonides had said that if he could be of use to such men in keeping them attached to Judaism, he would do so, even at the risk of "saying things unsuitable for ten thousand fools." Nachmanides, on the contrary, strove to present religion in an acceptable form to the "ten thousand fools." He therefore told the French rabbis that Maimonides did not write for them, who were happy in their faith and beliefs and were ignorant of philosophy.

"THE DISPUTATION"

1263

6. *What was the cause that led to the "Disputation on Christianity"?*

The head of the Dominican Order of monks at Barcelona, named Raymond de Pennafort, who was the confessor of King James I of Aragon, desired to convert the Jews to Christianity. He sent out a number

of preaching friars among the Jews of southern France and northern Spain. One of these was a Jewish convert to Christianity, named Pablo Christiani. As Pablo failed to convert the Jews in the south of France, Pennaforte requested King James to compel Nachmanides to take part in a public discussion with Pablo on the truth of Christianity. He assured the King that it could be proved, from the Talmud and other rabbinical writings, that Jesus was the Messiah. He thought that if Nachmanides were converted, the rest of the Jews would follow their rabbi's lead.

*7. What was Nachmanides' attitude toward the discussion?*

Nachmanides, who knew that such disputations were liable to lead to persecution, was not desirous of taking part in the argument. As he was compelled by the King to participate in the discussion, Nachmanides requested utmost freedom of speech, to which the King assented, and so he ultimately agreed to hold such a dispute.

*8. When, where and before whom was the discussion held?*

The debate was held in the year 1263 in the King's palace at Barcelona in the presence of the King, the officials of the Court and many high dignitaries of the Church.

*9. What were the subjects for discussion?*

The following were the subjects for debate:





*Disputation Between Jewish and  
Christian Scholars*



(1) Whether the Messiah had appeared; (2) whether the Messiah announced by the prophets was considered as divine or as man; and (3) whether the Jews or the Christians were in possession of the true faith.

*10. What were Nachmanides' answers?*

In the course of the discussion, which lasted four days, Nachmanides brought out the following points:

(1) Messiah had not yet appeared. The Messiah, said Nachmanides, would, according to prophecy, introduce a reign of universal peace and justice. This had not yet been fulfilled, for, since the coming of Jesus, the world had been filled with violence and injustice, and Christians were the most warlike of people, *i. e.* the people that shed most blood.

(2) The Messiah was to be regarded as nothing more than a king of flesh and blood, certainly not divine.

(3) The Agada in the Talmud (the Agada is one of two great divisions of the Talmud which contains no legal decisions, but explains the Bible in a preaching way, and includes many a story, anecdote, moral saying and maxim and a bit of history) on which Pablo relied to prove his views were, said Nachmanides, merely moral lessons and parables, and were to be regarded as individual sermons, and possessed no authority beyond the opinion of the preacher.

(4) The Jews did not believe in the coming of the Messiah as an end in itself. They did not desire the restoration of Palestine and the worship in the Tem-

ple, except as a means of spreading purity and holiness. (This view is also held by Maimonides.) Indeed, said Nachmanides, the Jews might even prefer to live under the King of Aragon than under the Messiah, for it was a greater merit for them to keep the commands of religion under a Christian monarch in exile, and while suffering humiliation and oppression, than to carry them out in prosperity and freedom in their own land under a Jewish king.

Then, turning to the King, Nachmanides said: "It behooves thee and thy knights, O King, to put an end to all thy war-making, as it is necessary for the beginning of the Messianic era."

*11. What was the decision on the debate?*

By such skilful thrusts as these, Nachmanides, who conducted the debate with great dignity, proved more than a match for Pablo, and the King told him that he had never heard a matter defended with such ability, and gave him a present as a mark of respect and recognition.

*12. What was the Dominicans' attitude toward the decision?*

The Dominicans claimed and falsely spread the report that Pablo scored a victory. Thereupon, Nachmanides published a pamphlet giving a true account of the proceedings.

*13. What was Pablo's step against the pamphlet?*

Pablo selected from this pamphlet passages which he said contained blasphemies against Christianity. Pennaforte complained to the King, but

Nachmanides said that he had published nothing which he had not said in the presence of the King, and that he had been granted full liberty of speech. The King recognized the justice of the plea and pardoned Nachmanides; but to satisfy the fanatical Dominicans, he sentenced Nachmanides to exile for two years, and ordered his pamphlet to be burnt.

*14. What was the Dominican's next step against Nachmanides?*

The Dominicans were not satisfied with the King's sentence, which they regarded as too mild a punishment. They appealed, therefore, to the Pope, and as a result of a letter which the Pope wrote to the King, Nachmanides was ordered to be banished for life.

*15. Where did Nachmanides go?*

In 1267, when he was an old man of more than seventy years, Nachmanides left Spain, his family, friends and pupils, and journeyed to Palestine. He found the Holy Land desolate. There were scarcely any Jews in Jerusalem, but Nachmanides induced some families from other parts of Palestine to settle there. They sent for some scrolls of the law, and used a house as a synagogue.

*16. When did the first censorship take place?*

As a result of the discussion, another evil effect was brought about. Pope Clement IV, at the request of Pablo, issued a Bull in 1264, ordering the Talmud to be burnt if the charges against it made by Pablo

were proved. Thereupon, King James I ordered that the Talmud be examined. Claiming that several passages in the Talmud bore witness to Christianity, the Dominican censors decided that the whole work of the Talmud should not be destroyed, but the passages which were regarded by them as offensive were ordered to be struck out. This was the beginning of censorship—another form of persecution.

*17. What was Nachmanides' principal work?*

Nachmanides' principal work was his commentary on the Pentateuch (the Five Books of Moses or Torah) called *Ramban*, which he wrote after he left Spain. One of his objects in writing this book was to encourage the study of the words of the Bible, "to satisfy the minds of the students by a critical examination of the text," and, when they read the portions of the Pentateuch in the synagogue, to bring peace to their minds, and "to attract their hearts by simple explanations and sweet words." Thus, Nachmanides sought to appeal to the heart as well as the mind.

*18. What was Nachmanides' view of the Torah?*

"In the Torah," said Nachmanides, "are hidden every glory, and every wonder, and every deep mystery, and in her treasures is sealed every beauty of wisdom." There is a meaning in all the commands of the Torah, said Nachmanides, even if we do not understand it. "They are all meant for the good of man, either to keep away from us something hurtful, or to educate us in goodness, or to remove from us an evil belief and to make us know God's name." All knowledge, according to Nachmanides, is, directly or in-

directly, the fruit of the Torah. Christianity and Islam are derived very largely from the Bible, and the laws of every civilized country are also based on the Torah.

*19. Tell briefly of the contents of "The Sacred Letter" and of "The Law of Man."*

In his work, *The Sacred Letter*, Nachmanides attempted to show that the human body was divine not less than the soul. As it was the work of God, it was perfect by nature. "It is only sin and neglect that disfigure God's creatures." In his *Law of Man*, Nachmanides seeks to sanctify suffering and death. They are, he says, "a service of God, leading man to ponder on his end."

*20. What other works did Nachmanides write?*

Nachmanides wrote numerous works on the Talmud, and was the author of many prayers and hymns. The following is an extract from one of his hymns, still included in the service for the Day of Atonement, in which he shows his strong faith in God's mercy and justice and his joyous anticipation of the life hereafter :

Ere time began, ere age to age had thrilled,  
I waited in His storehouse, as He willed;  
He gave me being, but, my years fulfilled,  
I shall be summoned back before the King.

Thou gavest me a light my path to guide,  
To prove my heart's recesses still untried;  
And as I went, Thy voice in warning cried:  
"Child, fear thou Him Who is thy God and King!"

Erring, I wandered in the wilderness,  
In passion's grave nigh sinking powerless;  
Now deeply I repent, in sore distress,  
That I kept not the statutes of the King!

Oh, be Thy mercy in the balance laid,  
To hold Thy servant's sins more lightly weighed,  
When, his confession penitently made,  
He answers for his guilt before the King.

Thine is the love, O God, and Thine the grace,  
That folds the sinner in its mild embrace;  
Thine the forgiveness, bridging o'er the space  
'Twixt man's works and the task set by the King.

O Thou, Who makest guilt to disappear,  
My help, my hope, my rock, I will not fear;  
Though Thou the body hold in dungeon drear,  
The soul has found the place of the King!  
(Translated by Alice Lucas)

*21. Tell of Nachmanides' activities in Palestine.*

Nachmanides spent much of his time in organizing Jewish communities, arranging for the erection of synagogues and generally assisting his brethren to establish themselves anew in the Holy Land. However, he did not live long in Palestine; after a period of three years in the Holy Land, he died in 1270, at the age of seventy-five, and was buried at Haifa.

*22. Tell of the legend about Nachmanides' death.*

A legend states that, when he went to Palestine, his pupils asked him to give them a sign by which they could tell the day of his death. He told them that when he died a rift in the shape of a lamp would be seen in



the tombstone of his mother. After three years, a pupil suddenly noticed this rift, and mourning for the rabbi was then begun.

*23. State Nachmanides' "Ethical Advice" to his children.*

"Accustom yourself to speak gently to all men at all times, and thus you will avoid anger, which leads to so much sin. Humility is the first of all virtues. Look not boldly at one to whom you speak. Regard everyone as greater than yourself. Remember always that you stand before God, both when you pray and when you converse with others. Think before you speak.

"Be careful that you read the 'Shema' (declaration of belief in One God recited by Jews daily) morning and evening, and say the daily prayers. Have always with you a Pentateuch (the Torah) written correctly, and read therein the lesson for each Sabbath. 'Cast thy burden on the Lord,' for the thing which you believe far from you is often very near to you. Know, again, that you are not master over your words, nor have power over your hand; but everything is in the hand of the Lord, Who forms your heart."

## XXX

### MORAL PHILOSOPHERS

#### 1. BACHYA IBN-PAKUDA 1000-1050

##### *1. Tell of the life of Bachya Ibn-Pakuda.*

Bachya ben Joseph Ibn-Pakuda lived in Saragossa in the north of Spain from about 1000 to 1050. He was appointed by the Jewish community as "Dayan" (judge) to decide all questions on Jewish law. As "Dayan," he must have been learned in Jewish law, but he also possessed a vivid imagination, eloquence of speech and beauty of style, and was capable of the deepest emotion. This is all we know of the life of this great moral-philosopher, Bachya. We can, however, imagine him as a great preacher, for he possessed a powerful personality, and his piety, humility and tolerance are reflected in every line of his great work.

##### *2. What is Bachya's great work?*

In 1040 Bachya wrote his great ethical work, called *Chovoth ha-Levovoth* (Duties of the Heart), written in Arabic and afterwards translated into Hebrew by Judah Ibn-Tibbon (1120-1190). It was the

first original systematic presentation of the ethics of Judaism.

3. *What was Bachya's object in composing his work?*

Bachya's object in writing his *Duties of the Heart* was not to argue about the doctrines of Judaism, but to appeal to the feelings and elevate the hearts of his people. He found it strange that, though there were commentaries on the Bible and the Talmud, and books on grammar, philosophy and other subjects, there was no systematic presentation of the ethical and spiritual side of Judaism. So he sought to supply what he regarded as a great need in Jewish literature, which neither the Talmudists nor the philosophers had filled.

4. *What were the sources on which Bachya based his work?*

The *Duties of the Heart* is based on the Bible, Talmud and other Jewish traditional literature, but Bachya also quoted some beautiful sayings from Arabic and other non-Jewish literature.

5. *What is the content of the "Chovoth ha-Levovoth"?*

The *Duties of the Heart* is divided into ten sections or "gates":

First Gate: "The Gate of the Unity of God."

Proving from the created world that the existence of the world cannot be due to mere chance, since where there is purpose manifested, there must have been wisdom at work, for ink spilled accidentally upon a sheet of paper cannot produce legible writing, and consequently there must be a Creator (first cause), Bachya proceeds to prove from the harmony of the

world that that Creator must be One. For the harmony of all things in nature, the interdependence of all creatures, the wondrous plan and wisdom displayed in the structure of the greatest and smallest of animal beings, from the elephant to the ant, all point to One great Designer (Aristotle's argument). There is no reason for the assumption of more than one Creator, since the world manifests but one plan and order everywhere. No one would, without sufficient reason, ascribe a letter written altogether in the same style and handwriting to more than one writer.

Second Gate: "The Gate of Reflection."

Bachya marvels at the wonders of nature—the change from light to darkness, the variety of color, the fertility of each grain of corn in the soil, the qualities of air and water, and so on. He ponders on the foresight with which the different parts of the human body are created, the way in which the tender organs are shielded, the manner in which food, clothing and commerce are utilized for the service of mankind, and similar facts of life. Such things, he says, must tend to fill man's soul with gratitude and praise and love for the wisdom of the Creator.

Third Gate: "The Gate of Divine Worship."

True service of God, Bachya says, should come from the heart, and should not be prompted either by fear of punishment or desire for reward. The foundations of all religious practice rest, not on outward observance, but on the inner intentions of the heart, *i. e.* in devotion. "Man should bring to the service of God," he says, "as large a measure of cheerful attention as to the service of a human king. If he receives an order from an earthly monarch, he puts all his

heart, intelligence and skill into its execution. If he thanks a king for favors, in prose or verse, in person or writing, he uses the choicest language at his command, and leaves nothing undone to show his gratitude. If he does this for a man, who after all is only a frail and short-lived mortal, ought he not employ similar means in the Service of God?" In prayer, therefore, the body should be free from all other occupations, and the mind free from all outside thoughts. "The main thing," says Bachya, "is purity of soul and devotion of heart. Better is a little that springs from the heart than much without it. Try above all to purify thy deeds, no matter how few they may be. For the little that is pure is much, and the much that is impure is little and of no avail."

Fourth Gate: "The Gate of Trust in God."

It is folly, says Bachya, to put too much trust in wealth and in those who possess great fortunes. In fact, all that the world offers will disappoint man in the end. Only he who puts his confidence in God is independent and satisfied with what he has, and enjoys rest and peace without envying anyone. Confidence can be implicitly placed only in God, Whose wisdom and goodness comprise all times and all circumstances. For He provides for all His creatures out of true love, and with the full knowledge of what is good for each. Confidence in God, however, says Bachya, should not prevent man from seeking a livelihood, nor lead man to expose his life to danger. Suicide is a crime, often resulting from lack of confidence in an all-wise Providence.

Fifth Gate: "The Gate of Consecration of Action to God."

Nothing is more repulsive to the pious soul, says Bachya, than the hypocrite, who is far worse than the heathen who worships idols, but does not deceive men and insults God's majesty as does the hypocrite. Sincerity of purpose and devotion in service to God and man must be man's guiding light in life.

Sixth Gate: "The Gate of Humility."

Humility, says Bachya, is shown in gentle conduct to our fellowmen and in our attitude toward God. If we consider the humble origin of man and his shortcomings, compared to the greatness of God, all pride in our own merits must disappear. The High Priest himself, in order to learn and show humility in his high office, had to remove the ashes from the altar every morning.

Humility, he says, consists of: (1) Meditation on God's greatness and goodness; (2) Observance of the law; (3) Consideration for the shortcomings of others; (4) Patience to endure without complaint every hardship that God imposes; (5) Kindness to others; (6) Charitable judgment of their acts; and (7) Forgiveness for injuries received. Especially is humility shown in (8) Not finding faults with others; (9) Not rejoicing over their mistakes; (10) Patiently bearing insults; and (11) Not feeling pride in outward possessions. There is, however, a higher pride which encourages noble ambitions, such as the acquisition of knowledge and good deeds, and such pride is not inconsistent with humility, but may increase it.

Seventh Gate: "The Gate of Repentance."

Repentance for sin, says Bachya, consists of: (1) Full consciousness of the sinful act and deep regret for having committed it; (2) Change of con-

duct; (3) Confession of the sin and an earnest supplication to God asking His pardon; and (4) A perfect change of heart.

The rabbis, he says, rank a sinner who repents higher than a man who has never sinned. He quotes the beautiful saying of a rabbi to his pupil: "Were you altogether free from sin, I should be afraid of what is far greater than sin—pride and hypocrisy." Then Bachya tells the following story: A traveller who was laden with heaps of silver coins cast them into a stream which he wanted to pass, expecting to pave a way with them. He found, however, that all his coins disappeared, except one, with which he paid a ferryman to carry him across the stream. Repentance, says Bachya, is the one coin which will carry man across the stream of life to the shore of eternal salvation, when all life's treasures have been foolishly spent.

Eighth Gate: "The Gate of Self-Examination."

Bachya urges his readers to take a serious and lofty view of life, and carry out life's obligations and opportunities, in order to attain the perfection of the soul. Only the truly righteous men, the chosen ones of God, says Bachya, can attain the highest state of heavenly bliss.

Ninth Gate: "The Gate of Seclusion from the World."

A certain amount of seclusion from the world is necessary, says Bachya, in order to curb man's passions and prepare the soul for its higher destiny. One must not, however, withdraw himself, like a hermit, altogether from civilization. By seclusion, he means rather self-control and moderate living, reflection and

prayer. The object of all religious practice is the exercise of self-discipline, the curbing of passion and the placing at the service of God of all personal possessions and of all the organs of life. In communing with his own soul, a man should consider whether he has made the best use of his wealth. He should meditate on the many ways in which one man can help another; he should love for others what he loves for himself, and hate for others what he hates for himself.

Tenth Gate: "The Gate of Love of God."

The aim and goal of all ethical self-discipline, says Bachya, is the longing of the soul for God, in Whom it finds joy and peace, even though the greatest pain and suffering be imposed on it. Those who are imbued with the love of God, he says, find easy every sacrifice they are asked to make for Him, and no selfish motive mars the purity of their love. Thus was the love of Abraham and Job, Daniel and all the saintly martyrs, who were filled with the joy of self-sacrifice. For those who truly love God, the 613 commandments of the Torah are rather few in number, their whole life being consecrated to God with Whom they are one. As an illustration of this perfect unity of the loving soul with God, Bachya tells the story of the saint who, when found sleeping in the desert, was asked whether he did not fear the lions which prowled about near him. He answered: "I should feel ashamed of my God if I feared any being besides Him." Bachya did not approve of a man who has at heart only the welfare of his own soul. "A man may be as holy as an angel," he says, "yet not equal in merit to one who leads his fellow-men to righteousness and love of God."



6. *What was the influence of the "Duties of the Heart"?*

Bachya's work was read with great eagerness by the Jews in all parts of Europe. It became a treasury of devotion for the Jews of the Middle Ages, and parts of it, as well as some of Bachya's hymns and special prayers, were included in the prayer book.

7. *Illustrate Bachya's saintly soul by one of his prayers.*

Bachya's trust in God and the sanctity of his soul are shown in the following beautiful prayer of his:

"O God, I stand before Thee, knowing all my faults, and overwhelmed by Thy greatness and majesty. Thou hast commanded me to pray to Thee, and hast enabled me to offer homage to Thine exalted Name according to the measure of my knowledge, and to lay my supplication before Thee. Thou knowest what is for my good. If I recite my wants, it is not to remind Thee of them, but only that I may understand better how great is my dependence upon Thee. If, then, I ask Thee for the things that make not for my well-being, it is because I am ignorant; Thy choice is better than mine, and I submit myself to Thine unchangeable decrees and Thy supreme direction."

## II. ISAAC ABOAB

1300

1. *Who was Isaac Aboab?*

Isaac Aboab lived in Spain about 1300. Although he was a man of business, he devoted most of

his time to literary work and to preaching. He was a popular ethical writer, who combined extensive rabbinical and philosophical knowledge. He wrote three works: *The Ark of Testimony*, a book on Jewish ceremonies; *The Table of the Showbread*, on Jewish prayers and benedictions; and *The Candlestick of Light*. The first two unfortunately have been lost.

2. *What was the purpose of "The Candlestick of Light"?*

Isaac Aboab composed his *Candlestick of Light* (known popularly by its Hebrew name "Menorath ha-Maor") in order to present to the people, in addition to the rabbinical laws, to which so much attention was devoted, "the precious pearls that lie upon the bed of the Talmud ocean, and the passages that are so rich in beauty and sweetness." He therefore grouped together the rich religious and ethical material stored up in the vast treasure-house of rabbinical literature, and sought by it to brighten the minds and hearts of his brethren.

3. *State briefly the ethical teaching of "The Candlestick of Light."*

Isaac Aboab taught that true charity comprised gentleness of conduct. A woman should be helped before a man, age before youth, the weak before the strong. In describing the object of the "Succah" at the Feast of Tabernacles, he said that it was designed to warn us that a man must not put his trust in the size or strength or beauty of his house, though it be filled with all precious things. Nor must he rely on the help of any human being, even though he be a mighty ruler;

but he must put his trust in God, for He alone is mighty, and His promises alone are sure.

4. *What was the influence of "The Candlestick of Light"?*

*The Candlestick of Light* had a great influence in the Middle Ages in popularizing rabbinical lore and providing a religious reading book for the people. Beautiful moral and religious truths are prescribed in homely form, and the skilful way in which the author arranges the various rabbinical and Biblical topics and his deep earnestness and sincerity make a strong appeal. To those Jews who were not well versed in Jewish literature, it must have been particularly valuable. Furthermore, as the chants of the chazan (cantor) replaced the sermon in importance in the synagogue service (see chapter V), *The Candlestick of Light* provided a substitute for the living voice of the preacher.

## XXXI

### JEWISH TRANSLATORS

*1. What was the Jewish contribution to civilization in the Middle Ages?*

The Jews in the Middle Ages were largely responsible for the introduction of general culture to the people of Europe.

*2. In what way did the Jews introduce general culture into Europe?*

The Jews introduced general culture in two ways: (1) By composing original works on science and philosophy and (2) by translating works from foreign languages into the language understood by the people of Europe. Original thinkers like Maimonides, Solomon Ibn-Gabirol, Abraham Ibn-Ezra and other scholars took a prominent part in this movement of spreading culture among the people of Europe by means of writing original works on science and philosophy. This movement was also very largely assisted by translators of high rank like the Ibn-Tibbon family (three generations of translators), Jacob Anatoli, Abraham bar Chiya, Kalonymos ben Kalonymos, the Kimchi family and other scholars.

3. *Why were translations so important in the Middle Ages?*

Translations were particularly important owing to the fact that few educated people could read any foreign language. Moslems seldom knew Latin, which was the language of educated Christians, and few Christians understood Arabic. The Jews of Spain, Italy and the south of France translated the works of Greek writers into Arabic and Hebrew, and those of Arabic writers into Hebrew. These were again translated into Latin, and thus became known to Christian scholars, while from Latin they were translated into other languages. In this way the works of Greek philosophers like Aristotle and Arabic thinkers like Averroes, the writings of famous men like Euclid, Archimedes, Ptolemy and Galen, as well as all kinds of other scientific and literary works were made known to the world at large. Most of the masterpieces of ancient literature were introduced into the universities and libraries of the Middle Ages by these industrious Jewish translators.

I. JUDAH IBN-TIBBON

1120-1190

4. *Who was "The Father of Translators"?*

Judah ben Saul Ibn-Tibbon, who was born in 1120 at Granada, Spain, and emigrated to the town of Lunel, in the south of France, on account of the persecution of the Jews by the Almohads, was the founder of a family of translators, and was called "the father of translators." He knew Arabic and Hebrew thoroughly, and, as he was a great book collector and a

lover of correct and beautiful handwriting, he had all the qualifications of the translator.

5. *What works did Judah Ibn-Tibbon translate?*

Judah Ibn-Tibbon translated from Arabic into Hebrew Bachya's *Duties of the Heart*, Ibn-Gabirol's *Ethics and Necklace of Pearls*, Judah ha-Levi's *Kuzari*, Judah Ibn-Janach's *Grammar and Dictionary* and Saadiah Gaon's *Book of Beliefs and Opinions*. Jews who could not read Arabic naturally wished to know what these great men had written, and Judah Ibn-Tibbon supplied their wants. He had almost to invent a new Hebrew vocabulary for many of the scientific and other expressions used in the originals, so he coined new words modelled on the Greek and Arabic.

6. *What was Judah's profession?*

Judah Ibn-Tibbon was by profession a doctor, and was so popular as a physician that his services were sought by princes, bishops and other notable people. In a letter to his son Samuel, who was also a doctor, he gave the following sensible advice: "Thou mayest accept fees from the rich, but heal the poor without charge. Examine thy drugs and herbs regularly once a week, and never apply a remedy which thou hast not thoroughly tested. Take care of thine own health, for there is no greater disgrace than a doctor who seeks to cure others but cannot cure himself."

7. *What are Judah Ibn-Tibbon's own works?*

Judah's own works unfortunately have been lost; only his "advice to his son" has survived.

8. *What is the content of Judah's "Advice to his Son"?*

(1) Art of Translation:

"Use no strained constructions nor unusual words; endeavor to cultivate a concise and elegant style; and attempt no rhymes unless the verse is perfect. When thou writest a thing, always go over it again, for there is no man who can avoid mistakes."

(2) Art of Penmanship:

"Improve thy handwriting, for beauty of writing, excellence of pen, paper and ink are a test of the writer's work. Write in large, plain characters, and space thy lines evenly."

(3) Love of Books:

"Avoid bad society, but make thy books thy companions. Let thy bookcases and shelves be thy gardens and thy pleasure-grounds. Feed in their orchards; pluck the fruit that grows therein, gather the roses, the spices and the myrrh. If thy soul be full and weary, change from garden to garden, from furrow to furrow, from view to view. Then will thy desire renew itself, and thy soul be satisfied with delight."

(4) Care of Books:

"Take good care of thy books, cover thy shelves with a fine covering and guard them against damp and mice. Write a complete catalogue of thy books, and examine the Hebrew books once a month, the Arabic books every two months, and the pamphlet cases every three months. Arrange them all in good order, so that no time is wasted in looking for a book. Refer continually to the catalogue, so as to remember what books thou hast. Do not refuse to lend books to anyone who has not the means to buy them, but only when he is sure to return them. When thou lendest a book,

make a memorandum of it before it leaves the house, and, when it is returned, cancel the entry. Every Pass-over and Tabernacles call in all thy books that are out on loans."

## II. SAMUEL IBN-TIBBON

1150-1239

### 9. *Who was Judah Ibn-Tibbon's successor?*

Judah Ibn-Tibbon was succeeded by his son Samuel, who followed in the footsteps of his father as a translator, and even excelled him both in skill of translating and in philosophical grasp. Samuel Ibn-Tibbon received a wide and thorough education from his father and other teachers in the Talmud, Arabic, medicine and other branches of knowledge.

### 10. *What works did Samuel translate?*

Samuel Ibn-Tibbon was a warm supporter of Maimonides, some of whose works he translated from Arabic into Hebrew. The most important of these was *The Guide to the Perplexed*, and it was Samuel who gave this great work the Hebrew name, *Moreh Nebuchim*, by which it has since been known. He also translated into Hebrew some of the works of Aristotle, which were afterwards translated into Latin. Samuel also wrote some original works, including commentaries on Ecclesiastes (*Koheleth*) and Genesis.

### 11. *What was Maimonides' advice to Samuel?*

When Samuel Ibn-Tibbon informed Maimonides that he was working on the translation of *The Guide to the Perplexed* from Arabic into Hebrew, Maimon-



ides, full of joy, replied and gave him some advice how to handle so difficult a task:

"Whoever wishes to translate and render each word literally, slavishly adhering to the order of words and sentences in the original, will meet with difficulty, and his translation will be faulty. The translator should first try to grasp the sense of the subject thoroughly, and state the theme with perfect clearness in the other language. This, however, cannot be done without changing the order of words, putting many words for one word, and so on, so that the subject be perfectly clear in the language into which he translates."

### III. MOSES IBN-TIBBON

1240-1283

#### *12. Who was Samuel Ibn-Tibbon's successor?*

Samuel Ibn-Tibbon was succeeded by his son Moses (flourished between 1240 and 1283), who followed in the footsteps of his father and grandfather as a translator. Moses ben Samuel Ibn-Tibbon published an immense number of translations from the Arabic and other languages, on astronomy, medicine, philosophy, mathematics and other subjects, and he also translated into Hebrew some of Maimonides' writings with which his father had not dealt.

#### *13. What was Moses' profession?*

Like his father and grandfather, Moses was also a doctor and teacher of medicine. Although he and other Jews had been largely responsible for the training of most of the doctors of Provence, he suffered from the foolish decree which was issued in his

time, prohibiting Jews from treating non-Jewish patients.

#### IV. JACOB IBN-TIBBON 1236-1304

##### *14. Who was Jacob Ibn-Tibbon?*

Jacob ben Machir Ibn-Tibbon, a grandson of Samuel Ibn-Tibbon, was an astronomer and translator. He translated numerous scientific and philosophic works from Arabic into Hebrew. Among them were some of Euclid's and Averroes' works. Jacob occupies an important place in the history of astronomy in the Middle Ages. His original works are: (1) A description of the astronomical instrument called "the quadrant"; (2) Astronomical tables. These works, which were translated several times into Latin, enjoyed the greatest reputation, and were quoted by the famous astronomers Copernicus, Reinhold and Clavius. Like the other members of the Ibn-Tibbon family, Jacob was also a doctor, and was held in great esteem for his medical knowledge.

#### V. JACOB ANATOLI 1194-1256

##### *15. Who was Jacob Anatoli?*

Jacob Anatoli, son-in-law of Samuel Ibn-Tibbon, was also a noted translator. He was the first to translate the Arabic philosopher Averroes into any other language. He translated it into Hebrew. This work, which was afterwards translated into Latin, was of considerable importance in the history of medi-

eval philosophy, as, by means of Averroes' commentaries on Aristotle, the writings of the great Greek philosopher were introduced to Christian scholars. Jacob Anatoli also translated Aristotle's book on logic, and astronomical and other works. The Emperor Frederick II thought so highly of Jacob's work as a translator that he induced him to settle in Naples, and granted him an annual income.

*16. What was Jacob Anatoli's attitude toward Maimonides?*

Jacob Anatoli was a most enthusiastic admirer of Maimonides. His esteem for the author of *The Guide to the Perplexed* knew no bounds; he placed Maimonides next to the prophets, and opposed the anti-Maimonists. He accepted Maimonides' teachings, and used to express his views in sermons on the Sabbath and festivals. These sermons Anatoli collected in a book called *Malmad ha-Talmidim*, which had a double meaning, expressing the author's double purpose, *i. e.* "Teacher of the Disciples" and "Goad to the Students."

*17. What was Anatoli's view of non-Jews?*

His broad-minded view of non-Jews, Jacob Anatoli expressed in his *Malmad ha-Talmidim* by stating that the Greeks were noted for their wisdom, the Romans for their power, and the Jews for their religion. All men were formed in the image of God, but the Jews were chosen to spread God's word on earth. If, however, a non-Jew devoted himself to the search after truth, his merit would be all the greater, and he mentions Michael Scott (a Scotchman, who

was also employed in literary work by the Emperor Frederick) as a man of this type.

## VI. ABRAHAM BAR CHIYA

Died 1136

### *18. Tell of the literary activities of Abraham bar Chiya.*

Abraham bar Chiya, who lived in Spain and the south of France in the first half of the twelfth century, was another famous Jewish translator. He was, however, far more than a translator—he was also a philosopher, moralist, mathematician and astronomer. He was one of the most important figures in the movement of spreading Arabic literature and science in the Christian world. Like Abraham Ibn-Ezra, he had a most remarkable range of interest. He wrote original works on geometry, arithmetic, optics, astronomy and music; and he published astronomical tables and books on the Jewish calendar and Jewish ethics. His translations from the Arabic, Latin and other languages were innumerable. Only a man who was himself a scientist as well as a linguist could have translated the works of other scientists with such accuracy and intelligence. By the Jews he was given the title Nasi (prince) and by Christians he was called Abraham Judaes (Abraham the Jew.)

### *19. Tell of Abraham bar Chiya as a moralist.*

Abraham bar Chiya is also noteworthy as a moralist. In his ethical work, *Meditation of the Soul*, he appeals to his readers to lead a life of purity and devotion. He pays a tribute to the ancient sages of the

heathen world who, without a knowledge of the Torah, arrived at truths, though in an imperfect way. "Greater is he," said Abraham, "who has succeeded in training himself to abandon every thought of worldly passion, and longs only for the service and worship of the Most High, than he who has still to wrestle with the appetites of the flesh, though he overcome them in the end. In the time of the Messiah, when the evil spirit of man shall be banished altogether, and hatred and strife shall give way to love of man and faithful obedience to the Will of God, no other laws than the Ten Commandments will be necessary, and all men will share in the eternal bliss of God."

## VII. KALONYMOS BEN KALONYMOS 1286-1337

### 20. *Who was Kalonymos ben Kalonymos?*

Kalonymos ben Kalonymos, who was also born in Provence, was a translator, humorist and moralist. His knowledge of languages and sciences was immense. The Talmud, Arabic, Greek and Latin were all known to him.

### 21. *Tell of Kalonymos as a translator.*

Kalonymos ben Kalonymos translated from Arabic into Hebrew the works of Euclid, Galen and Averroes. He also translated an Arabic collection of fables called *The Treatises of the Righteous Brethren*. These comprised a series of arguments between men and beasts in the presence of the king of birds on the question whether man had the right to rule over the world or not. Kalonymos gave a Jewish color-

ing to the story by allotting the chief part of the discussion to a Jew. King Robert of Naples, hearing of his fame as scholar and translator, invited him to translate Hebrew books into Latin for him. Upon the invitation of the king, Kalonymos went to Rome, and his learning, handsome appearance and charm of manner made him a great favorite in Roman society. King Robert called him "the new Solomon."

*22. Tell of Kalonymos as a moralist.*

In his ethical work, *The Touchstone*, Kalonymos ben Kalonymos compares the world to a vast sea, upon which there floats a small and frail little boat—namely, man. It is steered by the power of the divine spirit that directs its course and keeps it constantly moving with its heavy load of cargo, which is man's deeds during his life. On the opposite coast is the realm of Eternity, where God sits on His throne, and also the realm of darkness. "Now, O son of man," says Kalonymos, "it will entirely depend on the nature of the cargo that thou landest on the opposite shore—namely thy deeds in thy past life—whether thou wilt be sent to the regions that glow with eternal life or to those in which darkness reigns supreme."

*23. Tell of Kalonymos as humorist.*

In his ethical work, *The Touchstone*, Kalonymos ben Kalonymos ridicules the faults of the people of his day, the wealthy snob, the ignoramus who thinks he is a literary genius, the hypocrite, and so on. He makes merry over his supposed misfortune at having been born a male, for he has to bear the yoke of all the

six hundred and thirteen commandments of the Torah  
and other restrictions:

Its many laws and regulations,  
Which are unknown to other nations,  
Every Hebrew must observe  
With watchful eye and straining nerve.  
E'en though he shares in public functions,  
He still must follow their injunctions,  
Which I would tell you have been seen  
To be six hundred and thirteen.

He complains that he must cram his head with languages, science, history and other learning, and wishes he had been born as a care-free girl, knitting and gossiping and laughing through life:

He must cram full his suffering head  
With languages, alive and dead,  
With ethics, logic and philosophy,  
Astronomy also and theosophy,  
And cabalistic learning, too,  
And history, old as well as new,  
And fill his overloaded brain.

. . . . .  
How truly grateful I should be,  
If Thou hadst but created me  
A girl devoid of worldly care,  
And blessed with beauty ripe and rare.  
From early morn till late at night,  
Where shine the moonbeams' silvery light,  
I'd spend the hours in peaceful knitting,  
Contented to be ever sitting  
Amidst a busy, smiling crowd  
Of girls that sing and laugh aloud.

He bears, however, his fate with patience, he says, and recites the blessing in the morning service that he was not born a woman:

And humbly then these words I say  
 (With silent protest and dismay):  
 "O Lord, I thank Thee ('tis not scorn)  
 That I was *not* a woman born.  
*(Translated by Dr. J. Chotzner)*

In a satire on the hypocrite, Kalonymos ben Kalonymos says:

Well may he sit with downcast look  
 With eyes glued to his Hebrew book,  
 And shake his body to and fro  
 His splendid holiness to show.  
 But yet, in truth, his heart within  
 Is hard as stone, and black with sin;  
 And he is e'er a sad disgrace  
 To Jewish creed and Jewish race.  
*(Translated by Dr. J. Chotzner)*

### VIII. JOSEPH KIMCHI 1105-1170

#### 24. *Who was Joseph Kimchi?*

Joseph ben Isaac Kimchi (1105-70) had emigrated from the south of Spain to Narbonne, the principal congregation of the south of France at the time of the Almohad persecution in Spain in the middle of the twelfth century (1148). He was grammarian, Bible commentator, poet and translator, and was one of the scholars to introduce the Spanish-Jewish culture to the south of France. Among the works which he translated from Arabic into Hebrew were Solomon



Ibn-Gebirol's *Choicest of Pearls*, and Bachya's *Duties of the Heart*. He had a clear style, and showed much skill in arranging the material in his grammatical works. Among his compilations were some beautiful hymns.

## IX. DAVID KIMCHI

1160-1235

### 25. *Who was David Kimchi?*

Joseph Kimchi had two sons, Moses and David, who followed in the footsteps of their father as grammarians and Bible commentators. David was only a child when his father died, so he was brought up and educated by his elder brother Moses. Moses was far inferior to his father as a grammarian and Bible commentator. David, however, was superior to his father, and was one of the best-known Hebrew grammarians and Bible commentators. His Bible commentary is called *Radak*, from the initials of his name (Rabbi David Kimchi). Although David Kimchi was not a translator, his contribution to the movement of spreading Hebrew knowledge in the Christian world was noteworthy. His commentary on the Bible was translated into Latin, and had a great influence on the English Bible, for David Kimchi was a favorite authority of Christian students of Hebrew at the time of the Reformation, and this is seen on almost every page of the Authorized Version.

### 26. *What were David Kimchi's grammatical contributions?*

David Kimchi's most important work was his Hebrew grammar, called *Michlol* (Perfection), to

which he attached a dictionary of the Bible called *The Book of Roots*. So popular did his grammar become that the writings of grammarians like Judah Chayuj and Jonah Ibn-Janach (990–1050), on whom his own work was largely based, were rendered superfluous. He was the first to discover the difference between the long and the short vowels, and thus threw light on the vowel changes of the Hebrew language. He also wrote rules for the writing of Biblical scrolls, for notes to the text of the Bible and on accents. He was well versed in the whole range of Hebrew literature, and, in truth, was the teacher of the Hebrew language to the Jews and Christians of Europe.

## XXXII

### A JEWISH HISTORIAN

ABRAHAM IBN-DAUD

1110–1180

#### 1. *Who was Abraham Ibn-Daud?*

Abraham Ibn-Daud was born at Toledo about the year 1110, and thus lived at the same time as Abraham Ibn-Ezra and Judah ha-Levi. He was a learned Talmudist, scientist, philosopher, historian and a doctor by profession. His historical work, however, has proved of greater service to Jewish literature than his philosophical studies.

#### 2. *What is Abraham Ibn-Daud's historical work?*

Abraham Ibn-Daud's historical work is the *Sefer ha-Kabbalah* (Book of Tradition). The Karaites in Spain had grown in importance, and in order to oppose their views, Abraham, in his historical work, undertook to prove historically that rabbinical Judaism represents an unbroken chain of tradition from Moses to his own time. He gives in concise form a brief authentic history of Bible times and the period that followed, the rabbis who created the Talmud, the gaonim, and the scholars of his own day in their proper order. His description of the various Spanish congregations is interesting and full of information, and he

possessed a flowing Hebrew style with poetic coloring. Abraham also wrote two other historical works, one dealing with the early history of Rome, and the other with the history of the Jews during the period of the Second Temple.

3. *Why is Abraham Ibn-Daud's history so important?*

Abraham Ibn-Daud's *Sefer ha-Kabbalah* is important for the simple reason that few history books, recording accurately the events of Jewish history, have come down to us from the Middle Ages. We have to glean our facts very largely from indirect sources—the letters of the gaonim and rabbis, the compositions of poets, the introductions to commentaries, prayers mourning some persecution, arguments between the supporters and opponents of scholars like Maimonides, the lives of great men, the notes of travellers and so forth. Item by item, the little scraps of information have been pieced together to form a connected story. Abraham, however, was one of the few Jewish writers in the Middle Ages who sought to write history in a scientific fashion, and in his history he gives us a brief, but accurate and authentic, history from Moses to his own time.

4. *Tell of Abraham Ibn-Daud as philosopher.*

To Abraham Ibn-Daud, grammar, mathematics and law were of little importance. What interested him more was the solution of the deepest problems in existence, which centered round a proper knowledge of God. In a book called *The Sublime Faith* (*Emunah Ramah*), which was written in Arabic, Abraham embodied his philosophical views. He was the first Jew-

ish follower of that great Greek philosopher Aristotle, the world's first scientist. Ibn-Daud reaches God as the necessary first cause or prime mover of the Universe. As such God must be Infinite and therefore has no body or form (incorporeal), for bodies have limits. God must be wholly independent, therefore He must be alone—One. (See chapter XXX. "First Gate" of Bachya; and chapter XXIV. Principles 1, 2, 3, 4.) As to God's nature, we affirm no more than His existence; we can say what He is not rather than what He is. To these principles, Abraham adds also the principles of prophecy, reward and punishment, free will. Many of his suggestions were accepted by Maimonides. True philosophy, he said, does not entice man from religion, but strengthens him in his belief. The apparent defects and imperfections in the world do not contradict the wisdom and goodness of God; they only appear to do so to a limited mind which considers every event separately and not in relation to the whole divine scheme. "Many who have dabbled a little in science," Abraham said, "are not able to hold both lights—the light of belief in the right hand and knowledge in the left. Since with such men the light of research has extinguished the lamp of belief, the multitude think inquiry altogether dangerous. In Judaism, however, knowledge is a duty, and it is not right to spurn it. Any limitation of the study of science is an interference with the plan of God, Who did not endow man with a mind without reason."

*5. What is Abraham's view on the aim of philosophy?*

The aim of philosophy, according to Abraham Ibn-Daud, should be the realization of the moral ends,

and it is such ends, he said, that Judaism presents. The moral and religious duties taught by Judaism are: a true knowledge, belief and love of the One God; justice and humility; family obligations; the duties of citizenship; honesty in commerce; charity; the ceremonial laws and so on.

In 1180 Abraham Ibn-Daud died a martyr; he was killed at Toledo during an attack on the Jews of that city.

## XXXIII

### POET-HUMORISTS

#### I. JUDAH AL-CHARIZI

13th Century

1. *Who was Judah Al-Charizi?*

Judah ben Solomon Al-Charizi lived in Spain at the end of the twelfth and the early part of the thirteenth centuries. He was a celebrated interesting poet-humorist, great traveller and translator. He was a warm admirer of Maimonides, and took an active part in the arguments between the Maimonists and anti-Maimonists. He translated Maimonides' *Commentary on the Mishnah* (only in part) and *The Guide to the Perplexed*. It was his version of the *Guide* which was afterwards translated into Latin and thus introduced to the Christian world.

2. *Tell of Al-Charizi's qualities as a poet.*

Judah Al-Charizi had an excellent command of both Hebrew and Arabic, and was very skilful in his use of words. He was one of the first Jews to write in rhymed prose, a style invented by the Arab poets. The following is an example of his rhymed prose:

"From Siddim's vale to Chaldea's pale, went I, and when arrived, the thought revived, to try all to see,

that there might be, rising, growing, coming, going, of the worst and the best, east and west. As I strode on the road one day, I espied on a stone, all alone, at the highway side, a stranger sitting, resting him. As befitting, I addressed him, aiming at interesting him as travellers do when a few or two chance to meet in a country street. And I said, What cheer, neighbor dear? Whence hast thou strayed, and what thy trade? He said, from daring feat to daring feat, as it chances, my roving pleasure ever glances. A fox I chase, or run a race, with the mountain sheep; no hill too steep or vale too deep for me to pace. Said I, tell me, since thou so much hast wandered, some wondrous thing that thou hast pondered. He answered. . . ."

One of Al-Charizi's poems contains twenty-three lines, every line of which is written one-third in Hebrew, one-third in Arabic, and one-third in Aramaic. The Arabic part rhymes with the Hebrew, and the Aramaic has the rhyme throughout.

*3. What was the position of poetry in Al-Charizi's time?*

After the death of Judah ha-Levi, Hebrew poetry in Spain did not maintain the same high level. None of the poems which have survived from the thirteenth and subsequent centuries bear the stamp of poetic genius which characterized men like Ibn-Gabirol, the Ibn-Ezras and Judah ha-Levi. Unfortunately times had changed; Jewish poetry and the love for it had greatly declined. Al-Charizi, who was a great traveller, visiting France, Egypt, Syria, Palestine and other countries, experienced painfully the passing of the lovers of literature and poetry; and thus in mournful tones he sang:



The fathers of song, Solomon and Judah,  
And Moses besides—all shone in the west,  
And rich men were rife then who purchased the  
pearls of their art;  
How sad is my lot now times are so changed  
The rich men have gone, and their glory hath set  
The fathers found fountains—for me ne'er a fountain  
will start.

*4. What was the cause for the decline of poetry and the lack of love for it?*

Persecution and oppression naturally had much to do with the decline of poetry. The "Golden Age" had almost disappeared; the position of prosperity and freedom which the Jews in Spain attained under the Moslems and under the tolerant Christian monarchs was almost no longer in existence. Thus poetry declined. There were still, however, many poets, though of far inferior rank. So, owing to the fact that there were numerous poets, a certain indifference existed in the hearts of the former patrons of Hebrew literature toward poetry, and consequently a lack of love for it.

*5. What is Al-Charizi's best-known work?*

Judah Al-Charizi's best-known work is called in Hebrew *Tachkemoni* (The Wise One), and is written in the form of a dialogue, in which all kinds of subjects, both humorous and serious, are introduced. The poet had a genial disposition, and his work is full of wit and sparkling epigrams. There are stories in verse, clever criticism of writers and other men, and experiences in travel.

6. *Tell of Al-Charizi as a poet-humorist.*

(1) One chapter in Al-Charizi's book *Tachkemoni* entitled "An Unlucky Marriage," tells an amusing story of a man who was enticed into a marriage with a supposedly beautiful maiden, whom he did not meet till after the ceremony, when she proved to be the ugliest woman he had ever seen.

(2) The following is a poem of an unhappy lover :

O lovely maiden, thou hast drawn my heart  
To thee, as though by some magician's art.  
Yet though my love is like a glowing flame,  
Thy coolness brings me but to scorn and shame.  
Mind, if I perish through thy chill disdain,  
The folks will say, "Here's one by woman slain."  
*(Translated by Dr. J. Chotzner)*

(3) The following is a poem on the power of the pen :

My Muse, though airy, glides softly along,  
Singing full oft a voiceless song;  
My pen, though frail and slim of figure,  
Has serpent's tooth and lion's vigour.  
*(Translated by Dr. J. Chotzner)*

(4) In a little epigram in verse the poet describes white as the color of mourning, for his black hair turned white when he started lamenting his lost youth.

(5) The following is a fable of a tough old cock:

The elders of a synagogue arrive at an inn and order poultry. The innkeeper tells them there is only one ferocious old cock. The elders, however, insist on the cock being brought before them, whereupon the old bird addresses them. He reminds them of his valu-

able services in rousing them in the morning by crowing, and in producing a large number of chickens which have given them much food. He tells them that he is now old and tough, and, if they eat him, they will get indigestion and have to call a doctor, and he also quotes from the Bible in pleading for his life. So the old cock is spared.

We can understand how, with such varied material as this, the *Tachkemoni* became a very popular book.

## II. IMMANUEL OF ROME 1265-1330

### 1. *Who was Immanuel of Rome?*

Immanuel ben Solomon di Roma (of Rome) was born in the year 1265. He was one of the most striking representatives of Jewish wit in the Middle Ages. His range of knowledge was extraordinary—he knew Hebrew, Latin, Arabic and Greek. He was a poet, and, in addition to his poems, he wrote Hebrew commentaries and treatises on grammar, medicine, astronomy, mathematics and philosophy. By profession he was a doctor, but on the death of his father-in-law, Rabbi Samuel, he was also appointed rabbi to the Rome congregation.

### 2. *What is Immanuel's best-known work?*

Immanuel's best-known work is his *Machberoth* (Collections), a series of Hebrew short studies and poems in which the serious and frivolous are closely interwoven. It consists of twenty-eight chapters in verse and rhymed prose.

3. *Characterize the contents of Immanuel's book.*

In his book *Machberoth*, Immanuel deals with numerous subjects, most of which serve him as opportunities for making fun. Bible phrases are used by him for puns and satire; indeed, humor and mockery are to him second nature. Love, wine and song are his favorite subjects. He also ridicules the vanities and follies of his neighbors, the petty quarrels of husband and wife, and the jealousies of writers.

4. *Tell of Immanuel as a humorist.*

The following are examples of Immanuel's wit:

(1) The Effect of Medicine:

As a doctor Immanuel was once called to a patient who was suffering from indigestion. He prescribed medicine, and advised the patient to remain in bed till the following morning, when he hoped to find him completely recovered. The patient was a poet, and feeling inspired during the night, he got out of bed and composed a long poem. The next morning he showed it to Immanuel, whom he told that the medicine had done no good. "Pardon me, my friend," replied Immanuel, "my medicine has had an excellent effect. It has removed from your brain a large amount of rubbishy poetry."

(2) Hell and Paradise:

Immanuel tells his readers that one day, having learned of the sudden death of a friend, and being already sixty years old, he felt some anxiety with regard to the future owing to his own sins:

At times in my spirit I fitfully ponder,  
Where shall I pass after death from this light,

Do heaven's bright glories await me, I wonder,  
Or Lucifer's kingdom of darkness and night?  
(Translated by Dr. J. Chotzner)

Being desirous of knowing the fate that awaited him beyond the grave, he invoked the spirit of the Prophet Daniel, who offered to guide him through the gates of hell and into the fields of the blessed. Immanuel asked first to be conducted into hell.

A. Hell:

(a) In the hell he sees all the wicked people of the Bible; he watches the souls of the sinners being dragged through the gate to receive punishment, and sees them being tortured.

(b) This gives Immanuel an opportunity of mocking at the people he knows. He describes the punishment of gamblers, misers, spendthrifts and hypocrites. Here is a foolish man who scoffed at science, there a scholar who lived an immoral life, and on every side are the selfish and the vain, quack doctors, and men who pretended to be wise but stole other people's brains.

(c) He comes across a certain man whose habit it was, while in the synagogue, to lift up his eyes to the women's gallery instead of heavenward. At the sight of this man, Immanuel says he became pale with fear, remembering his own fault in this direction. Daniel, however, who accompanied him, reassures him, and says that, though he is not quite free from sin, yet his virtues as the author of several excellent books will procure him a place in Paradise.

B. Paradise:

(a) In the Paradise Immanuel sees the souls of all the great Jews of the past. He also sees a group of

souls in a dazzling blaze of glory, and these, he is told, are the pious of all peoples, who are given seats of honor.

(b) Here he finds also a beautiful throne being prepared, and this, he is informed, is for his friend Dante (Italy's poet, the greatest non-Jewish poet of the Middle Ages, who was born in the same year as Immanuel). He himself is to have a similar throne by Dante's side, for they both have striven after the truth. Moses, David and Solomon praise his commentaries on their productions.

#### *5. Tell of Immanuel's popularity.*

Immanuel became very popular, and was admired for his literary gifts. He wrote in both Hebrew and Italian, and his fame as a poet and scholar spread to France and Spain. Although Immanuel was full of sparkling humor, his writings also had a serious side, and he wrote a number of prayers and hymns full of earnestness and warmth of feeling. His Hebrew sonnets are among the first sonnets written in any language.

#### *6. What caused Immanuel to leave Rome?*

After acting for some time as rabbi, Immanuel had the misfortune to lose all his belongings, owing to his having stood security for some friends who failed to pay their debts. Reduced to poverty, he was obliged to leave Rome, and wandered forth a poor, broken-down exile. Ultimately he found a home with a generous patron till his death in 1330. Protected by his kind-hearted patron, Immanuel collected and revised

all his writings and made of them one work, *Machberoth*, upon which his fame principally rests.

7. *Who was Immanuel's faithful companion in his trouble?*

Immanuel's faithful companion in all his changing fortunes was his wife, whom he described as the model of all women. The following is an example of the tender love poems he addressed to her:

Thine eyes are as bright, O thou sweetest gazelle,  
As the glittering rays of the sun's golden spell,  
And thy face glows as fair in the light of the day  
As the red blushing sky when the morning is gay.  
Ah, shall I praise the bright charm of thine eyes,  
That move every heart, that win all by surprise?  
For peerless thy charms, and unequalled thy birth,  
Thou art of heaven, all others of earth.

*(Translated by Dr. J. Chotzner)*

In the companionship of his wife Immanuel found happiness in the midst of his troubles:

Whenever troublous hours I find  
That rob me of my peace of mind,  
To thee I haste, my little bride,  
And all forget, when by thy side.  
Let others laud their castled towers,  
Their magic nooks, their gladsome bowers;  
For me that place hath the chiefest charms,  
That brings me, dearest, to thine arms.

*(Translated by Dr. J. Chotzner)*

Immanuel lost both his wife and his friend Dante

in the same year (1321), and in answer to a poem of condolence, he wrote:

The floods of tears well from my deepest heart;  
Can they e'er quench my grief's eternal flame?  
I weep no more, my woe is still the same;  
I hope instead that death may peace impart.

(Translated by Dr. J. Chotzner)

8. *Who was the last Jewish poet of the Middle Ages?*

Neo-Hebrew poetry, which began with Jose bar Jose (end of the sixth century), and reached its highest point in Solomon Ibn-Gabirol and Judah ha-Levi, attained its final stage of development in Immanuel. Verses and rhymes were, of course, written after his days, but they are as far removed from poetry as a street-song from a soul-stirring melody.

9. *Why is Immanuel called the Jewish Dante and the Heine of the Middle Ages?*

Immanuel is described as the Jewish Dante, owing to the fact that his description of *Hell and Paradise* has much in common with Dante's *Divine Comedy*, and due to his sparkling wit, he is called the Heine of the Middle Ages.



## XXXIV

### A POET-MORALIST

YEDAYAH BEDARESI

1270-1340

#### 1. *Who was Yedayah Bedaresi?*

Yedayah ben Abraham Bedaresi was born about 1270 at Beziers in Provence in the south of France (whence he derived his surname Bedaresi). He was a popular poet-moralist, philosopher and doctor. He was also called "The Orator" and "Penini" (The Bringer of Pearls). They were both appropriate names, for some of his works display real eloquence and contain many pearls of wisdom.

#### 2. *Tell of the early life of Yedayah Bedaresi.*

Yedayah was a precocious child, for at fifteen he was a Talmudic scholar. At fourteen he published a hymn called "The Mem Prayer," comprising a thousand words, each beginning with the Hebrew letter "Mem." He introduces Biblical passages in an ingenious way, and the ease with which he handles the Hebrew vocabulary is astonishing in a young boy. When he was seventeen, he wrote an ethical work called *The Book of the Garden* (Sefer ha-Pardes),

which deals with such subjects as the worship of God, education, the laws of conduct, friendship, and grammar, astronomy and poetry. At eighteen he wrote a defence of woman in answer to a work called *The Woman Hater*. This support of the fair sex was written in rhymed prose, and was called *The Rustling of Wings* or *The Woman Lover*. He describes a war waged by a king, who was a great woman hater, against an army composed of the friends of woman-kind. The king is defeated, and his rival, who reigns in his stead, introduces a new happy era for women, who are wooed and loved more dearly than before.

### 3. *Tell of Yedayah's literary contributions.*

As he grew older, Yedayah Bedaresi composed more serious works, including commentaries on the Aggadic portions of the Talmud and Midrashim and on the *Sayings of the Fathers*. He also wrote various treatises on philosophy, books on medicine and chess, and a poem called "The Thousand Alefs," each of the thousand words of the poem beginning with the first Hebrew letter "Alef." In this poem he bewails the suffering and exile of the Jewish people.

### 4. *What is Yedayah Bedaresi's best-known work?*

Bedaresi's best-known work is a poem called *Bechinath Olam* (The Examination of the World), which is divided into thirty-seven chapters, and in which he makes an earnest appeal to his readers to aim at the highest mode of life. It is upon this great work that Yedayah's fame as a poet-moralist rests.

5. *What is the content of "The Examination of the World"?*

The content of Bedaresi's *Examination of the World* may be summarized as follows:

Even the sage is liable to changes of fortune, and he is not free from any of the evils which attack humanity. The sword of death wounds alike the wise and the ignoramus. If, however, this view is depressing, there is another thought which is consoling. The soul which lives within man, when he is deprived of this world's possessions, will accompany him beyond the grave. To the shame of humanity, man does not care to improve this noblest part of himself. He is led astray by the charms of the world, and his years roll away in search of illusions.

Yet the world is nothing but a stormy sea. Time is nothing but a bridge across the waters of life. The slightest carelessness will throw the man who crosses the bridge into the water below. "Of what avail," Yedayah asks, "are thy possessions to thee when the sea rises and foams and threatens to wreck the little hut (*i. e.* the body) wherein thou liest? Canst thou boast that thou canst calm or fight against the powerful waves? Are then worldly pleasures worth seeking? After their enjoyment follows a period of despair and a void which is never filled. But do not, child of man, accuse the Author of all nature of the evils that overwhelm thy short and frail existence. The evils of which thou complainest are of thine own making. As for God, His words are all wisdom and goodness.

"The occupation worthy of the soul's noble origin is to direct all its faculties to the worship of its Creator, the happiness of its fellow-creatures and the tri-

umph of truth. This result can be attained only by keeping the commandments of God. Therefore use thy time as thou wouldst a doubtful companion—take the good and avoid the evil. Remember that the companionship of time is but of short duration. It flies more quickly than the shadow of evening. We are like a child that grasps in his hand a sunbeam. He opens his hand, but, to his amazement, finds it empty and the brightness gone.”

*6. What was Yedayah's attitude toward Maimonides' teachings?*

Yedayah Bedaresi was a vigorous supporter of Maimonides and the study of science, and wrote a warm defence of the author of *The Guide to the Perplexed*. He said: “Turn neither to the left nor to the right from all that the wise believed, the chief of whom was the distinguished master Maimonides, of blessed memory, with whom no one can be compared from among the wise men who have lived since the close of the Talmud.” He also said: “Maimonides was the last of the gaonim in time, but the first in rank.”

## XXXV

### JEWISH TRAVELLERS

#### *1. Why are the Jews a wandering people?*

The Jews were always great wanderers and travellers. The Jew wandered throughout the history of his race. Among the causes are the following:

##### (1) Persecution.

Oppression and expulsion have scattered the Jewish people over the face of the earth, and caused them to seek a place of refuge where its rulers were tolerant to them. If his position in his new land, owing to different causes, became unbearable, the "Wandering Jew" once more rose up, with his staff in his hand, and went out to seek his fortune somewhere else.

##### (2) A Restless Spirit.

A roving disposition (as in the case of Abraham Ibn-Ezra) prompted many a Jew to seek comfort in change of scene.

##### (3) Commerce.

The demands of commerce induced many Jewish traders to make long journeys in connection with their business.

##### (4) Education.

Scholars made it a practice to study under different teachers, and thus travelled from town to town for this purpose.

## (5) Love of Zion.

The attractions of Zion led many Jews, like Judah ha-Levi, to leave their native country and end their days in the Holy Land.

*2. What information came down to us from the early travellers?*

We have little information from the wanderers. If every learned Jewish traveller had recorded his experiences, he would have had many interesting things to relate and would have added much to our knowledge of history.

# I. BENJAMIN OF TUDELA

12th Century

*3. Who was Benjamin of Tudela?*

Benjamin ben Jonah of Tudela in Navarre, Spain, was one of the most important Jewish travellers of the Middle Ages, whose records of experiences and observations came down to us. He started about 1160 on a journey round the world. His journey, which occupied him thirteen years (1160–1173), was by way of Saragossa, Barcelona, the south of France, Italy, Greece and Turkey, to Syria, Palestine, Arabia and Persia. On his return journey he travelled by way of the Indian Ocean, the Persian Gulf, Egypt, Sicily and back to Spain. Benjamin of Tudela was a merchant, and everywhere he went he made notes of the things he saw and heard and the people he met, which he afterwards embodied in an account of his travels, written in Hebrew, entitled *Massaoth Benjamin* (Travels of Benjamin).

*4. What observations and information are recorded in Benjamin's book?*

Benjamin of Tudela gives many particulars about the general life of the people, their government, history and buildings in the countries he visited. The ancient monuments at Rome, the Caliph's palace at Bagdad, and such ancient cities as Damascus, Constantinople and Jerusalem are described with numerous details. Benjamin everywhere inquired with regard to his own people. He records the number of Jews and their occupations and the names of rabbis in each town. He tells us about the Karaites at Constantinople, Damascus and other cities, and about the Samaritans at Nablus (ancient Shechem), Cæsarea and elsewhere. He gives particulars of the exilarch at Bagdad, and he is the chief source of information regarding David Alroy, the pretended Messiah.

At Lunel in the south of France, Benjamin tells us of great activity in Jewish learning, among the scholars there being Judah Ibn-Tibbon, the great translator. Foreign students, he says, are supplied with food and clothing at the public expense the whole time they stay at school. At Thebes there were about two thousand Jews, "the most eminent manufacturers of silk and purple cloth in all Greece." At Constantinople the Jews still lived outside the city. Many of them were manufacturers of silk cloth, and others were rich merchants. "No Jew," says Benjamin, "is allowed to ride on a horse except Rabbi Solomon, the Egyptian, who is the King's physician, and by whose influence the Jews enjoy many advantages, even in their state of oppression." He found Jewish glass manufacturers at Antioch, shipowners at Tyre, and dyers at several

places. He came across many small isolated communities of a few families, and two instances (one of which was Jaffa in Palestine) of places where only one Jew lived. In both cases they were dyers, apparently a favorite occupation among Jews at that time.

At Jabneh in Palestine, where once learning flourished, there were no Jews at the time of his visit. The Colleges of Sura and Pumpeditha had been closed for more than a hundred years. He gives details of the traditional tomb of the Prophet Ezekiel, and he describes the pilgrims who visited the tomb each year. At Rome he found Rabbi Yechiel acting as Chamberlain to the Pope.

#### 5. *Why is Benjamin's book important?*

(1) Benjamin of Tudela's book is important owing to the fact that his account contains numerous valuable details of the political history and internal development of countries and nations. As a merchant, Benjamin of Tudela was naturally interested in the trade of the countries which he visited, and his book affords the oldest material for the history of the commerce of Europe, Asia and Africa in the twelfth century. (2) Of special importance are his statistics of Jews in various places. It is from his accounts that we have the first accurate census of the Jewish population in certain districts and cities. (3) His information of Jewish sects and of the occupations of Jews are also of special interest and value. With the only exception of the *Book of Tradition*, written about the same time by Abraham Ibn-Daud of Toledo, there is no work which compares with Benjamin's in value.



## II. PETACHYAH OF REGENSBURG

### 12th Century

#### 6. *Who was Petachyah of Regensburg?*

Petachyah ben Jacob of Regensburg, Germany, was another important traveller, who in the years 1179 and 1180, soon after Benjamin of Tudela's tour, set out on a similar journey. He went to Poland, Russia, the "Land of the Chazars" (Crimea), Armenia, Persia, Mesopotamia, Syria and Palestine. The traveller's notes were collected and published, entitled *The Travels of Rabbi Petachyah*.

#### 7. *What information is recorded in Petachyah's book?*

Petachyah describes the tombs of the prophets and sages, such as Ezekiel, Ezra the Scribe, Rabbi Meir and Rab; the Jewish college and the exilarch's palace at Bagdad. He tells us that the Babylonian Jews prayed in the synagogue barefooted, and that the women were heavily veiled, according to the Moslem custom. He mentions that Samuel ben Ali, who was such a bitter opponent of Maimonides, and acted as both gaon and exilarch at Bagdad, had a daughter who was so learned in the Bible and Talmud that she gave instruction to young men. As, however, it was then considered improper for a woman to meet male pupils face to face, she lectured to them through a window, and her pupils listened to her outside the building, below the window, and thus out of sight.

In Jerusalem, Petachyah found only one Jew, Rabbi Abraham, who was allowed to remain in the city by the payment of a heavy tax. He visited all the sacred places in the Holy Land, the graves of the Patri-

archs, the caves in Galilee where the great Rabbis, Hillel and Shammai and their disciples were said to be buried. He mentions that Damascus was called by the Moslems "Paradise on Earth"; that the Karaites in the Crimea walked about wearing a fringed "Tallith"; that the "Sons of Kedar," in the south of Russia, when they went on a journey, pledged their faith in the following fashion: One thrust a needle into a finger, and invited his intended companion to swallow the blood, thus becoming of the same flesh and blood; that the people in these regions crossed the river by means of horses' hides tied to the tails of horses. He tells also of the occupations of the Jews in the countries visited by him.

### III. ESTORI PARCHI 1282-1357

#### 8. *Who was Estori Parchi?*

Estori Parchi was born about 1282 at Florence, Spain, (whence his family name Parchi, meaning "The Flower," is derived). He was also a traveller, and the first Jewish explorer of Palestine. At the age of thirteen he went to Montpellier to study astronomy. In addition to Hebrew literature, Estori Parchi had a knowledge of Latin, Arabic, medicine and the Greek philosophers. When the Jews were driven out from France in 1306, he travelled to Palestine, and spent seven years exploring the country. Estori not only devoted himself to the history and geography of the Holy Land, but gathered much information concerning the plants and animals of the country. He

was also a translator of medical works. He died in Palestine in 1357.

#### IV. ELDAD HA-DANI

9th Century

9. *Who was Eldad ha-Dani?*

Eldad ha-Dani (*i. e.* of the tribe of Dan) was a merchant and traveller at the end of the ninth century, about 300 years before the travels of Benjamin of Tudela and Petachyah of Regensburg. He professed to be a citizen of an independent Jewish state in East Africa, inhabited by the tribes of Dan, Asher, Gad and Naphtali. Starting from this supposed state, Eldad travelled to Babylonia, North Africa and Spain, and everywhere caused great excitement by his romantic accounts of the lost ten tribes.

10. *What is the "Jewish Arabian Nights"?*

The *Diary of Eldad ha-Dani*, the imaginary accounts of the lost ten tribes, has been called the "Jewish Arabian Nights."

11. *What is the content of Eldad's Diary?*

Eldad tells that he travelled with a man of the tribe of Asher. A great storm wrecked the boat, but God prepared for him and his companion a plank, on which they floated until they were thrown out on the shore, where a tribe of cannibals lived. Eldad's companion, who was fat, was immediately eaten, while he was put in a pit to fatten. Soon after another tribe attacked the cannibals, and Eldad was taken prisoner.

After four years Eldad was brought to China, where a Jewish merchant ransomed him for thirty-two pieces of gold.

He then continued his journey, and discovered the tribe of Issachar in Persia, living peacefully and studying the law. The tribe of Zebulon was found between Armenia and the river Euphrates, and near them was the tribe of Reuben. In southern Arabia were the tribes of Ephraim and half of the tribe of Manasseh, who were very warlike, while the tribe of Simeon and the other half of the tribe of Manasseh lived in the "Land of the Chazars" (Crimea). The tribe of Dan went to the Land of Gold (Kush) after the separation of Judah and Israel, and the tribes of Naphtali, Gad and Asher joined them later.

The tribe of Moses (Bene Mosheh) lived "on the other side of the river Kush," in beautiful houses, and were happy and prosperous. The mythical river Sambatyon surrounded their land. Eldad tells that the river Sambatyon is without water, but full of sand and stones, and it rolls sand and stones during the six days of the week and rests on the Sabbath. On Sabbath from sundown to sundown, a fire surrounds the river, and during that time no human being can approach within a half a mile of either side of it. All the tribes speak no other language but Hebrew.

*12. What was the popular attitude of medieval Jews toward the Diary?*

The stories of Eldad were widely circulated in the Middle Ages, and they became very popular with Jews, who heard with joy of these prosperous Jewish kingdoms.

13. *Is Eldad's story of the Lost Ten Tribes true?*

For a long time the *Diary* was accepted as true. Talmudic authorities like Rashi, Abraham ben David of Posquires, Abraham Maimonides and many other scholars quote Eldad as an unquestioned authority. The only scholars of the Middle Ages who questioned the truth of the *Diary* were Abraham Ibn-Ezra and Rabbi Meir of Rothenburg. The *Diary* is now, however, regarded by all modern scholars as a kind of historical novel and is not based on truth, though it is full of interest nevertheless.

## XXXVI

### JEWISH STORY-TELLERS

#### *1. What are the sources of fables and folk-stories?*

In the ancient world two nations only, the Indians and Greeks, are known to have had a considerable number of fables. The fables of Bidpai, the birth stories of Buddah, form the basis of a large number of the popular tales of medieval and modern times. In the Bible, however, there is only one fable of the trees choosing their king (Judges xi.8-15). This is a genuine fable which finds no comparison in either Greece or India. In the Talmud and other portions of early Jewish literature, there are many fox stories and other fables, and many of them were probably derived from Indian sources, where most of these stories originated.

#### *2. What is the Jewish contribution to story-telling?*

The Jews as translators not only were prominent in the movement of spreading general learning throughout Europe, but also took a prominent part, by means of translations, in introducing the ancient fables and folk-tales to all the countries of the western world. The Jews made the first translations of them from the original Indian versions into Hebrew, Ara-

bic, Latin, Greek and Spanish. These folk-stories and fables the children of all nations—the black child in India, the yellow child in China and the white children in Europe—have listened to with joy as they sat on their mothers' knees, or prattled to their nurses. Thus, the Jews may feel proud of the fact that they took an important part in creating and strengthening this bond of humor and romance between the nations.

### I. BERECHYAH HA-NAKDAN 12th Century

#### 3. *Who was Berechyah ha-Nakdan?*

Berechyah ha-Nakdan (*i.e.* "The Punctuator") lived in the twelfth century at Oxford, England. He compiled an interesting collection of one hundred and seven fox fables (*Mishle Shualim*), many of which are also to be found in Æsop's Fables. His fables, which he wrote in rhymed prose, were very popular on account of their wit and apt use of Biblical phrases. Berechyah was also a translator, grammarian, commentator on the Bible and Talmud and an ethical writer.

#### 4. *Give an example of Berechyah's fables.*

The following is one of Berechyah's fables called "The Wolf and the Animals":

The Wolf, the Lion's prince and peer, as the foe of all flesh did appear; greedy and grinding, he consumed all he was finding. Birds and beasts, wild and tame, by their families urged to the same, brought against him before the Lion an accusation, as a mon-

ster worthy of detestation. Said His Majesty: "If he uses his teeth as you say, and causes scandal in this terrible way, I'll punish him in such a way as to save his neck, if I may, and yet prevent you becoming his prey." Said Lion to Wolf: "Attend me to-morrow, see that you come, or you'll come to much sorrow." He came, sure enough, and the Lion spoke to him harsh and rough. "What by doing this do you mean? Never more raven the living, or live by ravening. What you shall eat shall be only dead meat. The living you shall neither trap nor hunt. And that you may my words obey, swear me that you'll eat no flesh for two years from to-day, to atone for your sins, testified and seen; 'tis my judgment, you had better fulfil it, I ween." Thereat the Wolf swore right away no flesh to eat for two years from that day. Off went Sir Wolf on his way, King Lion stopped at court on his throne so gay. Nothing that's fleshy for some time did our Wolf eat, for like a gentleman he knew how his word to keep. But then came a day when he was ahungered and he looked hither and thither for meat, and lo, a fat sheep fair to look on and goodly to eat (Genesis iii.6; an illustration of Berechyah's use of Biblical phrases). Then to himself he said: "Who can keep every law?", and his thoughts were bewildered with what he saw. He said to himself: "It overcomes me the longing to eat, for two years day by day must I fast from meat. This is my oath to the king that I swore, but I've thought how to fulfil it as never before. Three sixty-five are the days in a year. Night is when you close your eyes; open them, then the day is near." His eyes he opened and closed straightway. It was evening and it was morning, one day (Genesis i.6; another Biblical



phrase). Thus he winked until he had numbered two years, and his greed returned and his sin disappears. His eyes fix the goat they had seen and he said: "See beforehand I have atoned for my sin," and he seized the neck of the goat, broke it to pieces, and filled up his throat as he was wont to do before, and as of yore his hand was stretched out to the beasts, his peers, as it had been in former days and years.

5. *State some of Berechyah's maxims.*

Prefer the possession of one thing to the mere expectation of two.

A small certainty is better than a large peradventure.

Be a servant among noble-minded men rather than a chieftain over the vulgar.

If thou bearest thyself in this world like a guest receiving its hospitality, men will try to find for thee a place of honor and a place of profit.

The proud cedar is felled, while the humble shrub is left alone; fire ascends and goes out, water descends and is not lost.

Prefer freedom and content to all luxury at the prison of a stranger's table.

## II. ABRAHAM IBN-CHASDAI

1230

6. *Who was Abraham Ibn-Chasdai?*

Abraham ben Samuel ha-Levi Chasdai lived in Barcelona, Spain, about the year 1230. He was an industrious translator and also a story-teller, and had a knowledge of Hebrew, Arabic and Greek. He was the author of ethical and philosophical works, and was an enthusiastic admirer of Maimonides, some of whose works he translated from Arabic into Hebrew.

7. *What is Abraham's most popular book?*

Abraham's most popular book is a folk-tale, called *The Prince and the Dervish*, a Hebrew translation from the Arabic of a Buddhist legend, known as *Barlaam and Joshaphat*. In this book the story is told of a prince who was confined in a castle in order that he might know nothing of the sorrows of the world. One day, however, the prince meets a Dervish, exchanges clothes with him, escapes, and himself becomes a Dervish. Into the mouths of the prince and his Dervish friend, Abraham Ibn-Chasdai puts some charming tales, fables, love poems, maxims and proverbs, which made the book very popular in the Middle Ages, and it was translated into Latin, Spanish and other languages.

### III. JOSEPH ZABARA

13th Century

8. *Who was Joseph Zabara?*

Joseph ben Meir Zabara, who was born at Barcelona in the beginning of the thirteenth century, was a doctor, poet and a story-teller. He was a man of wide learning, having a knowledge of astronomy, philosophy, music and mathematics, in addition to Arabic and rabbinical literature.

9. *What is Joseph Zabara's popular book?*

Joseph Zabara's book is a collection of stories and fables called *Book of Delight*, in which the author relates how he meets a giant named Enan Manatash, who offers to take him to another land, pleasant as a garden, where all men are pleasant and wise. Joseph

refuses and tells Enan fable after fable about leopards, foxes and lions, all proving that it is best for man not to travel to foreign places. Enan, however, persuades Joseph to go with him and, as they ride along, they tell each other many interesting stories, and exchange witty remarks and anecdotes. When at last they reach Enan's city, Joseph discovers that his guide is a demon. Joseph then escapes and returns home to Barcelona.

## XXXVII

### FALSE MESSIAHS

#### 1. *What does Messiah mean?*

Messiah means "The Anointed." In early days of Jewish history every Jewish King was called "Messiah" or "The Anointed of God," because he was anointed with oil at the time of his accession to the throne. It meant that he was appointed by God to the high office. Sometimes even a non-Jewish king as, for example, Cyrus, King of Persia (538 B. C. E.), was called "Messiah," because he was appointed by God to deliver Israel from the yoke of Babylon. Later the term Messiah came to mean: one sent by God to deliver the Jewish people from oppression and to usher in an age of peace, justice and righteousness in the world.

#### 2. *What is the Jewish idea of Messiah?*

Maimonides, who is the author of the *Thirteen Principles of Judaism*, says with regard to the belief in Messiah as follows: "The King Messiah will in some future time come, restore the kingdom of David to its former power, build the Temple, bring together scattered Israel, and all the ancient laws will again be in force." The Prophet Jeremiah says: "Behold, the

days come, saith the Lord, that I will raise unto David a righteous branch, and he shall reign as king, and deal wisely, and shall execute judgment and justice in the land. In his days Judah shall be saved and Israel shall dwell safely" (Jer. xxiii, 5-6). Thus, all the qualities of Messiah are those of a human being in the highest possible perfection. No superhuman qualities are ascribed to him; all his glory, all his success, is dependent upon the Will of God. Messiah is an ideal man and an ideal king, but no more. Those who believe in a superhuman nature of Messiah are guilty of idolatry. The coming of Messiah is not expected to change the course of nature in any way. The only change we expect is that the Unity of God will be acknowledged universally, and that justice and righteousness will flourish over all the earth. Our sages express this principle as follows: "There is no other difference between the present time and the days of Messiah but the independence of the people of Israel."

### *3. What does false Messiah mean?*

A person who claimed to be the deliverer of Israel appointed by God to bring about the establishment of the Messianic kingdom was looked upon as Messiah. If he failed to fulfill his promise, he was called: "False Messiah." Some of the false Messiahs who have arisen at various times were impostors seeking to utilize the credulity of the masses for selfish purposes. Others, however, were victims of their own beliefs and self-delusions. All of them, however, had as their goal the restoration of the people of Israel to their Holy Land. Therefore, the term "false" can-

not be justly applied to all of them, as, indeed, most of them sincerely believed in, and were convinced of, God's consent to their mission of bringing redemption to Israel. They also believed in the possibility of carrying through their promises. In most cases they were the first who lost their lives and dearly paid for their daring. So not scorn and censure they deserve, but respect and admiration like men who sacrificed their lives for the deliverance of their suffering people. They are called "false" merely because they failed to fulfill their promises to bring relief to Israel.

*4. When did the false Messiahs begin to appear?*

From the days of Bar Kochba's downfall in the year 135, and even before that time, when Rome commenced its work of crushing the independence of Judea, the hope of the advent of a Messiah, who would restore the people of Israel to their independence, had never died down. No century has since passed without some individual rising from the ranks of Israel and claiming to be the long-awaited descendant of the royal house of David. Jews who were subject to continuous oppression naturally turned with longing to any thing which they thought would give them relief from their misery. Jewish mothers would wonder if they would give birth to the eagerly awaited Redeemer of Israel. The Messianic doctrine formed an important part in Judaism, and Jews followed implicitly Maimonides' declaration of faith: "I believe with perfect faith in the coming of the Messiah, and though he tarry, nevertheless will I wait for his coming." Persecution was thus a favorable soil in which to plant Messianic hopes.

5. *What was (1) the influence of the Messiahs, (2) the method of carrying through their mission, and (3) the effect of the Messianic movements?*

(1) The influence of the Messiahs was mostly local and temporary. Some, however, succeeded in attracting large numbers of followers, and created movements that lasted for considerable periods.

(2) Not all of the false Messiahs employed the same methods to reach their goal. Some sought to accomplish their aim through penitence, fasting and prayer, and looked forward to miracles to assist them. Others, however, appealed to arms; they raised the banner of revolt against the government, and tried to free their suffering people by force.

(3) The effects of these Messianic movements worked havoc and were disastrous to the Jewish people. Many of these Messiahs and their followers lost their lives in the course of their activities. They deceived the people with false hopes, created dissensions, gave rise to sects, and even lost many to Judaism.

## I. THEUDAS THE MESSIAH

### 44

6. *What was the Jewish position prior to the advent of Theudas?*

As long as the Jewish King, Agrippa I, lived, there was a golden age for Judea. Agrippa was amiable, benevolent, grateful and showed a forgiving disposition. His kind-heartedness changed opponents into friends. He looked after the interests of Jews and Judaism at home and abroad. The Roman Emperor Clau-

dius, to whom the "independent" kings of the small peoples were subject, was friendly to the Jewish King and Judaism. Rome and Jerusalem lived in peace. The Syrians, Greeks and Romans, who lived in Palestine, knew how to hide deeply their hatred toward the Jews, for they were aware of the fact that Claudius would punish them for ill-treating the Jews. This situation, however, did not last long. In the year 44 Agrippa I died suddenly while he was at the games in Cæsarea, and his death was mourned by all his brethren. The Syrians, Greeks and Romans of Cæsarea celebrated with joy his death. The Holy Land became once more recognized as a Roman province, and a Roman named Fadus was appointed governor (procurator) of Palestine. The Jewish position became unbearable. Burdensome taxation was imposed upon the Jews. The Roman legions trampled upon everything the Jews held sacred. Wherever they passed through, everything was razed to the ground. Houses were burned and fields destroyed. The Sanhedrin (the Jewish parliament) was degraded and the priesthood desecrated. Rebellious uprising was quenched with Jewish blood. The Jews realized that with arms in their hands they could not face the Romans. So they were convinced that something miraculous was to come to free the people from the Roman yoke. Messiah was about to appear. And he did come.

#### 7. *Who was Theudas?*

The intolerable Jewish position called forth a Messiah, a "deliverer," in the person of an exalted Jew named Theudas. He proclaimed himself the prom-



ised Messiah, who would deliver the Jews from oppression. He urged the people to follow him with their belongings to the Jordan, which would divide for them. From there they would march to Jerusalem, and drive out the Romans. He secured 400 followers. But before they reached the Jordan, the governor of Palestine, Fadus, sent a troop of horsemen after them. Many of them were slain, and the remaining were captured together with their leader, Theudas, who was beheaded.

## II. A MESSIAH OF EGYPT

*8. Did the tragic end of Theudas halt the Messianic movements?*

The failure of Theudas resulted merely in the execution of him and his followers, but it did not stem the Messianic movement. On the contrary, the slaughter of 400 men served as oil upon fire. The movement of overthrowing the Roman yoke grew stronger. Many Jews were ready to recognize as their leader any "miracle-man" who promised deliverance. So, a few years later another Messiah, an Egyptian, appeared, who succeeded in gathering around him 30,000 followers. He led them to the Mount of Olives, opposite Jerusalem, promising that at his command the walls of Jerusalem would fall down, and that he and his followers would take possession of the city. But he also failed. Before he could show any "miracle," a Roman troop met him. The "Messiah" escaped, and of those with him, some were killed, others captured, and the multitude dispersed.

## III. MENACHEM BEN JUDAH

70

9. *Who was Menachem ben Judah?*

Unlike the former Messiahs who expected their people's deliverance to be achieved through Divine help by means of miracles, Menachem ben Judah of Galilee, Palestine, was a warrior. When war broke out between Judea and Rome, he attacked the fortress of Masada, armed his followers with the weapons he found there, and marched upon Jerusalem, where he captured the fortress Antonia. Meeting with success, he now claimed to be the King Messiah, to whom the leadership of all the troops should be entrusted. As a result of a conspiracy against him, he met his death.

## IV. BAR KOCHBA

133-135

10. *Who was Bar Kochba?*

The inevitable fate of Judea came. Jerusalem was conquered, the Temple destroyed, a large number of Jews slain, and a larger number exiled to Rome. With the destruction of the Temple the appearance of Messiahs ceased for a time. Sixty years later in the year 133 there again appeared a Messiah. His method of restoring the people of Israel to their independence was by means of arms. The leader of this desperate effort was Simon "Bar Kochba" (son of a star), who proclaimed himself to be the Messiah. The people flocked to his banner, and even the famous Rabbi

Akiba believed in him, referring to him: "There shall come forth a star out of Jacob, and a scepter shall rise out of Israel, and shall smite through the corners of Moab" (Num. xxiv.17). Bar Kochba is fabled to have been a man of immense strength, who cast back with his knees the huge stones thrown by the Roman machines. He is said to have tested the valor of his soldiers by ordering each to cut off a finger, and, when the rabbis objected to this, the legend tells us that he issued an order that every horseman must show that he could tear up a cedar of Lebanon by the roots while running at full speed. A very large number of Jews fought under Bar Kochba's leadership, and for a time he was successful in resisting the might of Rome. At length, however, the Roman general triumphed, the last attempt to regain the independence of Judea failed, and Bar Kochba was killed.

## V. MOSES OF CRETE

440

### *11. Who was Moses of Crete?*

The unsuccessful attempt of Bar Kochba's war put an end for centuries to Messianic movements, but Messianic hopes were nevertheless cherished. Jews were being crushed under the Roman yoke, but their hope that the day of their redemption would come could not be extinguished. In accordance with a calculation found in the Talmud, the Messiah was expected in the year 440 or 471. At the end of the fourth century the widespread Roman Empire was divided into two parts—the eastern Empire and the western Empire. At the

beginning of the fifth century the barbarian Goths, Vandals and other tribes invaded the Roman Empire. Owing to the invasions of the Goths the western Empire became split up into fragments and soon ceased to exist. These disturbances brought to surface a Messiah, who appeared in the year 440 in Crete, an island in the Mediterranean Sea, and who attracted the Jewish population to his movement. His real name is unknown, but he called himself Moses, and promised to lead the people, like the ancient Moses, dryshod through the sea back to Palestine. He firmly believed that he had been chosen by God to be the Messiah and lead the Jews back to the Holy Land.

*12. What was the result of this movement? \**

His followers, convinced by him, neglected their daily occupations, and waited for the promised day. On the appointed day they left their possessions, took their children and marched toward the sea. Moses, their leader, ordered that they march into the sea, as it would divide. At his command many cast themselves into the sea. The majority of these exalted Jews, men, women and children were drowned, and others rescued themselves. The false Messiah himself disappeared. It is, therefore, believed that in his "craze" he, too, must have been drowned. This tragic end made a serious and severe impression upon the great Jews of that time. Seeing the lamentable results of the Messianic movements, they exerted themselves not to let the people be led astray by false Messiahs, deceivers or self-deluded. This effort was successful, though not for a long time.

## VI. SERENE OF SYRIA

720

*13. What was the Jewish position prior to the advent of Serene?*

When Mohammed died in 632, he was succeeded by Abu-Bekr, the first Caliph, who ruled only two years. The second Caliph, Omar, who ruled from 634, and subsequent Caliphs continued to make Islam supreme in other countries. "The Koran or the sword" carried the "faithful" to victory everywhere. Persia, Syria, Egypt, Palestine, North Africa and other parts fell before the conquering "believers," who soon captured all the Asiatic possessions of the Byzantine Empire. In the name of Mohammed these countries were flooded with blood, and, naturally, Jews suffered severely. Omar persecuted the Jews and compelled them to wear yellow badges on their clothes as a mark of humiliation. He drove the Jewish tribes out of Chaibar, in Arabia. Afterwards he grew milder in his attitude. At the beginning of the eighth century Omar II (717-720) renewed the restrictions imposed by Omar I, and added to them. Burdensome taxation and conversion to Islam by force crushed the Jews to the ground. The Jews had no other way to be saved but through Messiah. The desire for the restoration of the past glories of Zion was great. This induced some extremists, who called themselves "Mourners of Zion," to live as hermits in Jerusalem. They neither ate meat nor drank wine. They were dressed in black, lived in caves, fasted all days except Saturdays and holidays, and

constantly prayed to God to deliver their suffering people. Then a Messiah appeared in the person of Serene.

*14. Who was Serene?*

Between 720 and 723 a Syrian Jew named Serene appeared as the Messiah. Nothing is known about him, except the fact that he promised the expulsion of the Moslems and the restoration of the Jews to the Holy Land. Jews believed him. He had followers even in Spain, where the Jews were suffering under the oppressive taxation of their new Arab rulers (who invaded Spain in 711), and many left their homes for the new Messiah. Serene was also a religious reformer, and many Jews, especially those of Arabia, who were ignorant, followed him, because he permitted them many things which the Talmud had forbidden. He was a sworn enemy of Talmudic Judaism. He permitted his followers to disregard dietary laws, to work on the second day of festivals, to abolish marriage and divorce documents prescribed by the Talmud, and to marry near relatives forbidden by the Talmud. The abolition of many Talmudic laws and regulations attracted throngs of Jews, who felt they were hampered by the restrictions imposed by the rabbis of the Talmud. The followers of Serene numbered thousands.

*15. What was the result of this Messianic movement?*

Serene succeeded merely in misleading many Jews to disregard Talmudic Judaism, but politically he accomplished nothing. He was arrested and brought before the Caliph Yazid (successor to Omar II), who feared a rebellious uprising. Here Serene revealed himself as a truly false Messiah, a shameless deceiver

and swindler. He denied before Caliph that he had had any serious plans of rebellion, but that he only intended to make jest of the foolish Jews. Accordingly the Caliph handed him over to the Jews. Nothing, however, is known as to what the Jews did to him, or what became of him.

*16. What became of Serene's followers?*

With the disappearance of this truly false Messiah and reformer, the Messianic and reform movement also disappeared (though there were still some other groups of Jews who opposed the Talmud, and as a result Karaism came in existence 40 years later). Many of Serene's followers, repenting of their belief in him, desired to rejoin the communities from which they broke away by abolishing many Talmudic laws. The Syrian communities were doubtful, however, whether they ought to re-admit them. They referred the matter, therefore, to Natronai, gaon of the Pumbeditha College (719-730). His decision was liberal. "It is better to take them under the wings of God than to cast them out," he said. Thus the false Messiah and his reform movement disappeared.

## VII. ABU-ISA OBADIAH OF ISPAHAN

749

*17. Who was Abu-Isa?*

Hardly thirty years after the fall of Serene, another false Messiah appeared. His name was Abu-Isa Obadiah of the town Ispahan in Persia. It is said that he was a leper, and that suddenly he was cured of

his leprosy. He was of low origin, a plain tailor, and yet his followers relate that "though he could neither read nor write, yet he wrote books without any assistance." His followers claimed that this "miracle" furnished the strongest proof of his divine inspiration. History, however, has no record of any literary activity on his part. Abu-Isa maintained that the coming of the Messiah would be preceded by five messengers, and that each one would be more perfect than his predecessor. He considered himself the last and most perfect of the five, and of equal merit with Messiah. Afterwards, he declared that he himself was Messiah. He announced that God called him to free the Jewish people from the yoke of the nations and of unjust rulers. He found many followers among the Jews of Persia. It is said that 10,000 Jews gathered around him for the purpose of assisting him in his work of deliverance.

*18. What was the political situation in the land?*

The political situation of the Moslem rule was most favorable for an attempt to regain liberty by force. In all the provinces of the Moslem Empire the spirit of rebellion against the Caliph Mervan II (the last Caliph of the Ommayyad rule) was aroused. Ambitious governors, dissatisfied elements like the Abasides—all these conspired to overthrow the Ommayyad rule, and turned the wide dominions of the empire into a battlefield of fierce passions. The Abassides were successful in overthrowing the government and establishing their own rule. In order to make his position secure, the new Caliph commenced to put an end to all rebellious disturbances.



19. *What was Abu-Isa's method for freeing the Jews?*

Abu-Isa was a warlike man, and therefore he desired to accomplish his task of liberation with sword in hand. He accordingly made soldiers of his followers, and rode at their head like a general. He raised a revolt against the Caliph, who in turn sent an army against him. It is related by his followers that he surrounded his 10,000 men with a rope and assured them that they would be safe from the enemy's sword so long as they did not leave the enclosed space. The enemy, fearing some magic, fled from the rope, and Abu-Isa and his followers pursued and destroyed completely the enemy. Finally, Abu-Isa fell in battle. His followers were dispersed, and the Jews of Ispahan had to suffer for his revolt.

20. *What was Abu-Isa's attitude toward Talmudic Judaism?*

Abu-Isa was not a religious reformer. On the contrary, he praised the creators of the Talmud, and the rabbis, he said, were almost equal to the prophets. He was pious, praying seven times a day instead of three. He prohibited the use of meat and wine by his followers, and he entirely abolished divorce, even in the case of adultery. His followers, after Abu-Isa's death, loyally cherished his memory, and formed a sect, the members of which were called, after him, "Isavites" or "Ispahanites," after the name of their leader's town. Thus Abu-Isa became the founder of the first Jewish sect which arose in Judaism after the destruction of the Temple. They continued to exist until the tenth century. About the year 930 the sect existed in Damas-

cus only, and numbered not more than twenty persons. In time, however, they, too, disappeared.

## VIII. DAVID ALROY

1160

### *21. Who were the next Messiahs?*

Under the influence of the Crusades, in consequence of which the Jews suffered horribly, the number of Messiahs increased, and the twelfth century records many of them. One appeared in France about 1087, and was slain by the French, a second appeared in Cordova, Spain, about 1117, and a third in Fez, North Africa, about 1127. Of these three nothing is known except the mention of them in Maimonides' *Iggereth Teman* (Letter to the South). The next important Messianic movement appeared again in Persia under the leadership of David Alroy.

### *22. Who was David Alroy?*

David Alroy (or Alrui, meaning "the inspired one") lived about the year 1160 in Amadia, Persia, where he was born. He was a man of handsome appearance, clear mind and high courage. In his youth he left Amadia and went to Bagdad, where he studied under the Exilarch Solomon Chasdai and Ali ha-Levi, the gaon of the Bagdad College. He became thoroughly familiar with Biblical and Talmudic knowledge, as well as with Arabic literature. He was known as a worker of magic. About the year 1160 he declared himself a Messiah.

*23. What was the Jewish position in Babylonia at this time?*

The former colleges of Sura and Pumpedita had already disappeared over a hundred years (1040). In their stead, however, the Jewish communities of Bagdad and Mosul gained authority and prominence over all Asia. The Bagdad congregation numbered 1,000 Jewish families with four synagogues, and lived under the most happy conditions. The Caliph, Almuktafi, was friendly toward the Jews, and appointed Solomon Chasdai, a wealthy and learned Jew, exilarch over all the Jews in the caliphate. The prince of the exile was once more allowed to be surrounded by a retinue, to ride on a horse, to wear silk clothes and a turban, to be accompanied by a guard of honor, and to use an official seal. If he appeared in public, both Jews and Moslems were to rise before him, and a messenger went before him, crying: "Make way for our Lord, the son of David." The exilarch appointed rabbis, judges and readers in all the Jewish communities of Persia, Arabia, Mesopotamia, and in the distant communities as far as India and Tibet. Thus the office of exilarch was once more raised to the splendor of the time of Bostanai. There was also established in Bagdad an important college, to which students flocked from all parts (it is said that 2,000 students studied there). Ali ha-Levi (the father of Samuel ben Ali, the famous opponent of Maimonides) was the gaon of the college, and here David Alroy studied. The Jewish community of Mosul numbered 7,000 families. At the head of the community was a man named Zakkai, who bore the title Nasi (prince), claim-

ing to have been a descendant of the house of David.

*24. What was the Jewish position in Persia at this time?*

North of Mosul, among the mountains of Chaftan in the district of Adherbaijan, there were many large Jewish communities, some of which were oppressed under the Sultans and the Persians, but others were free and wild as the mountains on which they dwelt. These free Jews of Adherbaijan used weapons and were skilful warriors, always ready to avenge themselves on their opponents. They were the enemies of everyone who was not one of their religion or their allies. They lived in great ignorance, without knowledge of the sources of their religion. They accepted the rabbi, whom the exilarch sent to them, and acted according to his directions. Freedom was to them the most precious gift on earth; slavery the worst oppression and keenest humiliation. Hearing of the horrible suffering, persecution, oppression and bloodshed brought upon the Jews of France, Germany and Palestine by the savage beasts, the Crusaders, these free Jews, more than others, were longing for an opportunity to free their suffering brethren, liberate Jerusalem and restore the Jewish people to their Holy Land. And the opportunity did come.

*25. How did the movement begin?*

On his return to Amadia from Bagdad, David Alroy won the admiration of both the Jews and non-Jews, among whom was the governor of Amadia. They were amazed at his vast knowledge. His handsome appearance, clear mind, high courage and learn-

ing won him everyone's heart. The political situation was also favorable. In consequence of the Crusades, the position of the Caliph weakened. The government was divided among the weak Caliph, his Viziers and generals, everyone of whom played a separate part, and sought only conquest and increase of power. All these favorable conditions combined in encouraging David Alroy to raise the banner of revolt against the Sultan Muktafi. He called upon the oppressed people of Israel to regard him as their long-expected Messiah, and promised to deliver them from the yoke of the Moslems and to bring them back to Jerusalem. For this purpose they were to assist him in waging war against the nations. He sent letters to the free and warlike Jews of Adherbaijan, Mosul, Bagdad and other towns, and called upon them to come in great numbers to Amadia, and bring swords and other weapons concealed under their robes. He advised them to give as a pretext for their coming in great numbers their desire to study the Talmud under such a distinguished scholar as himself.

*26. What was the response of the Jews?*

In response to David Alroy's call, many Jews, who believed in him, assembled in Amadia at the appointed time, with sharpened swords and weapons hidden under their cloaks. David Alroy's intimate knowledge of the magic arts is said to have convinced many Jews of the truth of his Messianic claim, and he soon found himself with a considerable number of followers, burning to free themselves from Moslem tyranny. The governor of the town, who was David Alroy's friend, did not suspect anything, as he thought

that this great crowd was attracted to the town by Alroy's fame as a scholar.

*27. What was the next stage of development of this movement?*

What followed is uncertain. History has no record. Benjamin of Tudela (famous Jewish traveller at this time, between the years 1160 and 1173) tells the following story: The news of David Alroy's revolt reached the ears of the Persian Sultan, who sent for the Messiah. "Art thou the King of the Jews?" asked the Moslem ruler, to which Alroy replied: "I am." He was arrested and thrown into prison. Three days later, while the Sultan and his council were engaged in considering what punishment to inflict upon Alroy and his followers, the false Messiah suddenly appeared before them. He informed them that he had freed himself from the prison by the aid of magic, and added that he feared neither the Sultan nor his nobles. The Sultan ordered that David Alroy be re-arrested, but the latter, by his magic, made himself invisible and left the palace. Guided by the voice of David Alroy, the Sultan and his nobles pursued him to the banks of a river, where, having made himself visible, the marvellous wizard was seen to cross the water on a shawl. On the same day David Alroy returned to Amadia, a journey which ordinarily took ten days, and, appearing before his followers, related to them his wondrous adventures.

*28. What did the Sultan do to get rid of David Alroy?*

The Sultan ordered the Caliph of Bagdad to inform the Jewish representatives of Bagdad that, if

they did not turn David Alroy from his purpose, he would put all the Jews of his Empire to death. The exilarch and the gaon of Bagdad felt it their duty to appeal to Alroy. They threatened him with excommunication if he did not desist from his purpose. From Mosul also an appeal was made to him by the leader of the community, Zakkai, but all in vain. David Alroy paid no attention. At length, the governor of Amadia bribed David's father-in-law to slay him. So he killed his son-in-law while asleep, and thus the revolt was brought to an end. The Sultan nevertheless decreed a persecution upon the Jews that followed David Alroy, and the exilarch with difficulty appeased his wrath with a present of a hundred talents of gold.

*29. What was "the year of flying"?*

The enthusiasm for David Alroy was so great especially among the Jews of Bagdad that two impostors succeeded in deceiving the people and robbing their property. They produced letters which, they said, were written by David Alroy, and announced that on a certain night the people were to fly through the air from Bagdad to Jerusalem. For this purpose they were to come up to their roofs, put on green robes, and await the hour. In the meantime the followers of David Alroy were to give their property into the safe-keeping of these two messengers of the Messiah. The night came, the crowd was assembled on the roofs of their houses. Women wept, children shouted, everyone was on tiptoe with anxiety to try to fly, until daybreak opened their eyes to the fact that they were deceived. The two swindlers, in the meantime, escaped with the property entrusted to them. The Jews of Bagdad called

that year "the year of flying," and thereafter reckoned time from that event.

*30. What became of David Alroy's followers?*

Many Jews of the congregations of Adherbaijan continued to revere the memory of the murdered David Alroy for a considerable time. They formed a sect called "Menachemists," after David Alroy, who was also called "Menachem" (*i. e.* "comforter"), and swore by his name.

## IX. A MESSIAH OF YEMEN

1172

*31. Who was the next false Messiah?*

Soon after the death of David Alroy another man appeared in Yemen, Arabia, in 1172, and announced himself as the forerunner of the Messiah. It was just when the Moslems were making determined efforts to convert the Jews, who lived there, to Islam. He told the Jews that their oppression signified the early approach of the time of the Messiah, and called upon them to divide their property with the poor. In reply to the appeal from Yemen, Maimonides sent his celebrated *Letter to the South* (Iggereth Teman), in which he appealed to the Jews not to be discouraged by their troubles, which were a trial of faith and love. They must not be led astray by the Messiahs who had appeared among them, he said, but strengthen each other in their faith in God and in the law which He had revealed to Moses. Persecution might not cease, added Maimonides, but "Israel cannot be destroyed." Meanwhile, the false Messiah challenged the Caliph to



behead him, stating that he would still live. The experiment was tried, but no miracle resulted. Thus ended the life of another of these unfortunate and misguided enthusiasts.

### X. ABRAHAM ABULAFIA 1240-1291

#### *32. Who was Abraham Abulafia?*

Abraham ben Samuel Abulafia was born in Saragossa, Spain, in the year 1240. From his early youth he was a dreamer. When he was only twenty, he wandered about in search of the mythical river Sambatyon and the lost ten tribes that were supposed to dwell on its banks. But he only reached as far as Acre in Palestine, and returned to Spain. Living the life of a hermit, he had numerous visions, and became wrapped up in mystic studies. Letters of the alphabet, numbers and vowel-points became to him the symbols of God and the angels, and by their aid he sought the highest life.

#### *33. How did Abraham's Messianic claim begin?*

Abraham Abulafia was absolutely sincere and unselfish. His one aim in life was to preach the truth as he saw it to the mass of the people, and even to Christians. But as a result of his mystic studies, Abraham came to believe at first that he was a prophet. In a book which he published in 1279 he declared that God had spoken to him. In 1280 an "inner voice" called him to Rome to convert Pope Nicholas III to Judaism on the day before New Year. The Jew-hating Pope, who was then at Suriano, heard of the strange plan,

and soon issued orders that Abraham should be burnt. Not in the least disturbed, Abraham went to Suriano, where he learned that Nicholas had died the night before. Returning to Rome he was imprisoned, but was soon released.

*34. When did Abraham declare himself a Messiah?*

From Rome, Abraham Abulafia went to Sicily, where he was well received. Here he finally proclaimed in 1284 that he was not only a prophet but the Messiah, and announced the year 1290 as the date for the Messianic era to begin. A large number of Jews believed him, and prepared to go to Palestine. But the intelligent Jews of the Sicilian congregation hesitated to join him without investigation. They appealed for advice to Solomon ben Adret of Barcelona, the greatest rabbinical authority of that time (popularly known as "Rashba," from the initials of his name). The rabbi of Barcelona, who knew Abulafia's earlier career, sent a spirited letter, in which he condemned the pretended Messiah as illiterate and dangerous. Thereupon, some congregations and rabbis, who feared that a persecution might be the consequence of the Messianic movement, also declared against him. He was so much persecuted in Sicily that he had to leave the island.

*35. What became of Abraham Abulafia?*

From Sicily Abraham went to the little island of Comino near Malta, where he continued to publish books, in which he still asserted that he would bring deliverance to Israel. His end is unknown.

# XI. NISSIM BEN ABRAHAM

1295

## 36. *Who was Nissim ben Abraham?*

As a result of Abraham Abulafia's Messianic movement, there appeared at this time in Avila, Spain, a man named Nissim ben Abraham, who claimed to be a prophet, and announced the year 1295 as the date for the coming of Messiah. His followers told of him that in his youth he had been ignorant, and could neither read nor write. But an angel, who appeared to him in his sleep, suddenly endowed him with the power of writing a book, *The Wonder of Wisdom*, with a commentary on it. The leaders of the congregation of Avila appealed to Solomon ben Adret, who again condemned Nissim ben Abraham as a deceiver. "It is impossible that a man should go to bed an idiot and get up a prophet," he said.

## 37. *What became of Nissim's movement?*

In spite of the warning of the most honored rabbi of the time, Nissim ben Abraham succeeded in influencing a multitude of ignorant Jews, who prepared themselves for the coming of the Messiah. They fasted, spent money lavishly for charity, and, on the appointed day, went to the synagogue dressed in white, to hear the trumpet blasts which were to announce the coming of the Messiah. But instead of seeing the Messiah they noticed on their garments small crosses, which some scoffers had placed there. Some of the members of the congregation, who did not believe in the pretended Messiah, pinned the crosses secretly on

their garments, either to ridicule the movement, or to point out to what end Messianic movements like these were destined to lead them, and thus cure them of their delusion. In their disappointment some of Nissim's followers are said to have gone over to Christianity. What became of Nissim himself is unknown.

NOTE. The false Messiahs who appeared in the succeeding centuries will form a separate chapter in the next volume.

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